

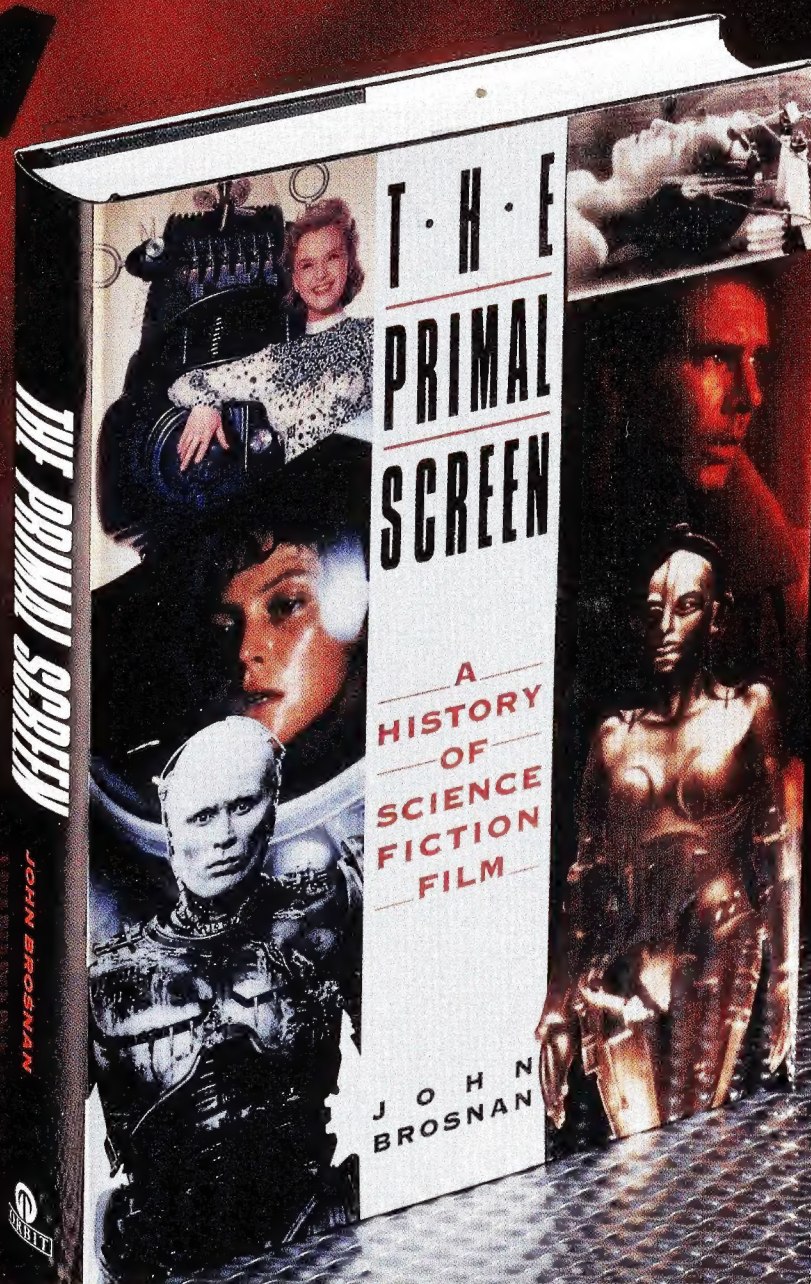
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NOVEMBER
1991

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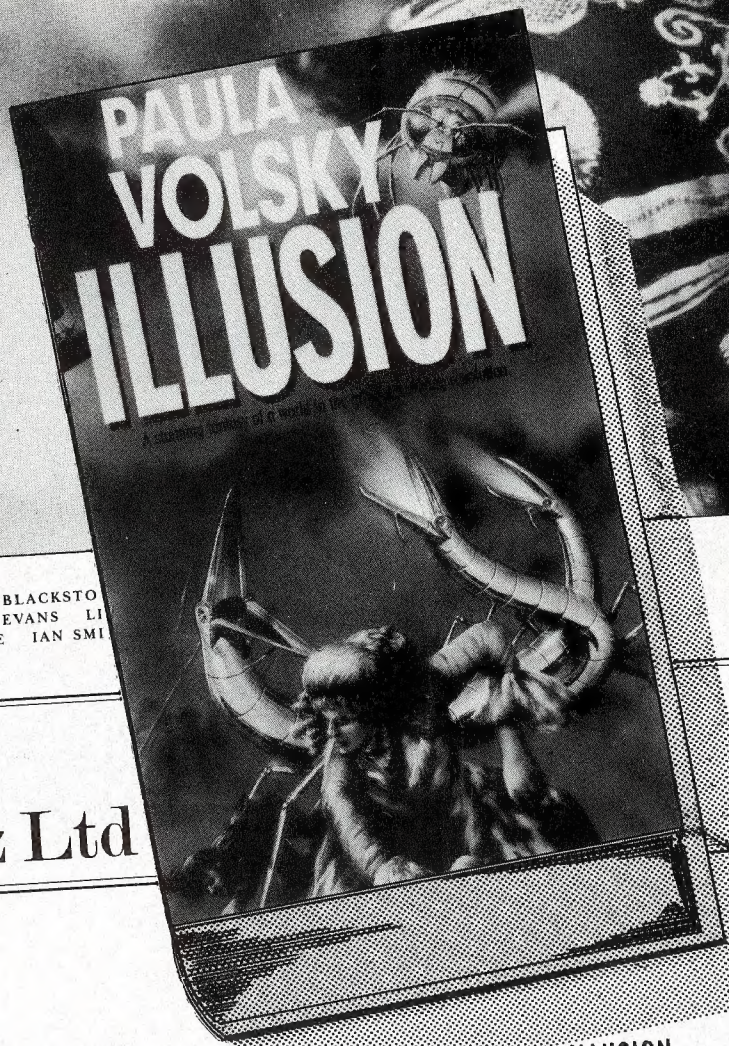
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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 53**November 1991**

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Interface

David Pringle

There's something of a fantasy bias to the contents of this issue – by my reckoning four out of the six pieces of fiction are more fantasy than sf – so perhaps I ought to take this opportunity to explain what we mean by “fantasy” in the context of *Interzone* stories. It states “Science Fiction and Fantasy” on our cover, but this has always been primarily an sf magazine. We don't envisage *Interzone* as a venue for straight fantasy, whether traditional ghost stories or tales of questing heroes in landscapes peopled by wizards and dragons. We added the words “and Fantasy” in order to give ourselves freedom to publish the weird, the outré, the offbeat, the indefinable, in addition to science-fiction stories hard or soft.

Of course, we reserve the right to be inconsistent on occasions; thus, we brought you a pure sword-and-sorcery story in our issue 46, Michael Moorcock's “Elric: A Dragon Wakes.” But by and large we do not see *Interzone* as a fantasy magazine in the sense that the book market now defines the term. Although there are large overlaps, fantasy is very much a genre in its own right these days. We would like to produce a sister magazine which concentrates on that type of fiction, and perhaps one day soon we shall. Not for the moment, though.

Whether or not a new, “pure” fantasy magazine comes into existence, *Interzone* will continue to publish stories at the boundaries of imaginative writing – “crossover” stories, hard-edged fantasy, urban fantasy, fabulations, call them what you will. Plus, of course, all types of material which can, with confidence, be defined as science fiction.

SF Magazines Without End

Talking of new magazines, recent months have seen the launch of several small-press efforts in the sf & f area: *SF Nexus*, *R.E.M.*, *ProtoStellar* and *Scheherazade* to name a few more or less at random. Most of these are quarterlies (or even less frequent). Now we've heard tell of another which sounds a bit more ambitious: **Far Point** is a new bimonthly edited by IZ subscriber Charlie Rigby, from Kettering. It will have a full-colour cover (and some colour interiors) and the first issue is due to contain material by such professional writers as Brian Stableford. It should be out by the time you

read this. Also out, in revamped “professional” form, is **New Moon SF**, the erstwhile small-press *Dream* magazine edited by Trevor Jones (see his letter in the last IZ), with stories by Keith Brooke, Matthew Dickens and others who will be familiar to our readers. All pleasing developments.

Potentially the most interesting development, though, is signalled by the talk we hear about a “television magazine” to be launched by **BBC Select**, the subscription TV service. As we understand it, this will be a weekly, two-hour sf-and-fantasy news-and-discussion programme which will start airing in the latter part of 1992. That is, if they can find the potential for 30,000-plus UK subscribers. Perhaps this will be something like a miniature, British version of the forthcoming American cable service known (abysmally) as the **Sci-Fi Channel**.

Nick Austin to Roc Books

Following my slightly sarcastic comments about **Penguin Books'** new “Roc” line (last issue's *Interface*), I'm pleased to report that veteran sf editor **Nick Austin** has been appointed to oversee and advise on all Penguin's sf and fantasy publishing. This is splendid news. Ironically, I contrasted Penguin's sf publishing policy with that of Granada/Grafton Books (now part of Harper Collins); Nick Austin, ex-Harper Collins, just happens to be the editor who was responsible for the Granada and Grafton sf lines during many of their best years. Let's hope he can work similar wonders at Penguin.

(David Pringle)

Interaction

Dear Editors:

I have just received *Interzone* 49. As usual, it is excellent. There are, however, two things that have convinced me to write and comment.

First, Paul Campbell's letter. He might not have enjoyed a single story in thirteen issues, but I've read about twice that many, and I can only think of one piece off hand that I haven't enjoyed, and that was an extract from a novel. On the other hand, Greg Egan is absolutely brilliant, Eric Brown is very good, and just about everybody

else is thought-provoking at the very least. I don't think a special “happy issue” would be a good idea, although the occasional upbeat story wouldn't go amiss.

Incidentally, I am also in the position of not having any of my submitted stories published. However, I will keep on reading *Interzone* because I might learn something, and I will keep submitting stories because I would be proud to be published there.

But enough bootlicking. The reviews of the small press were interesting, and several of the magazines sounded promising. (I might get a story published in *Dream*, and *Works*, *R.E.M.* and *BBR* sound worth reading.) However, there appears to be one thing missing. Addresses. How do I get hold of these magazines? I even checked the Small Ads, but none of the ones reviewed were in there. Could you print the addresses, please?

David Chart

Thetford

Editor: Sorry. Next time, we promise.

Dear Editors:

With respect to Paul Campbell's letter in IZ 49, I would suggest that his view is entirely a matter of taste. I buy IZ for stories like Greg Egan's “The Infinite Assassin” (IZ 48), which admittedly could be described as impenetrable (I guess most people don't know about Cantor dust and measure theory), and is certainly told in an impersonal manner (which in my opinion gives the story its impact). Certainly Asimov has a more accessible style than Egan, and there is a place in the market for such a style, but I see no reason why it should be in IZ.

I don't like Asimov (I find his style bland), I don't particularly like fast-paced stories, but above all I dislike the idea of a “happy” issue. My other favourite stories (“In The Air” (IZ 43) and the marvellous “Crossroads” (IZ 46)) would also have been thrown out under a “happy” editing policy, and Philip K. Dick would have had a hard time selling any stories at all if they had to be accessible, fast-paced or upbeat. To think of two famous cases of happy endings, the films *Blade Runner* and *Mona Lisa* – the endings altered (presumably) so that people would go out of the cinema feeling good and tell their friends to go and see the film – is to think of two wrecked films. OK, admittedly no-one's

suggesting altering unhappy endings, but a consistent ending is surely better than an inconsistent, happy one!

Anyway, the magazine's great, but I have one minor quibble; I wish you wouldn't publish extracts from books, e.g. "The Angel of Goliath" (IZ 40), "Elric: A Dragon Wakes" (IZ 46). What's the point in having half a story? The book review section is reliable enough for me, and I'm not that desperate for a "big name" story. Apart from this, though, my only complaint is that I didn't discover IZ earlier.

Steve Jones
Sale, Cheshire

Editor: Gosh, we did receive a lot of comments on Paul Campbell's letter. The ones printed here represent only a fraction...

Dear Editors:

I can't say that I agree with Paul Campbell's letter (IZ49). Not liking a single story? Am I reading the same *Interzone*? I'll freely admit, here and now, some of the stories published leave me cold and/or confused, but an overwhelming majority I find interesting and, most important, disparate in nature. It's all in the mix. More "humane" sf: Hmm! There's humane stories in *Interzone* if you look hard enough; and the "doom and gloom" does a good job of focusing them. Coming soon to *Interzone*, "Cyber-fluffy-bunny-punk" and "Radical hard Care Bear" sf. God, I hope not! There's an apocryphal story of a newspaper (*Good News*) that published only good news – it never published the fact of its impending demise, caused by falling circulation. Worth thinking about?

Now, the real reason I'm writing. Are all the paperback publishers sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. I am sick to the back teeth of going to bookshops and finding most (if not all) of the books I want to buy in bloody trade paperback format (£7.99 – £8.99). A case in point is *Use of Weapons* by Iain Banks. I read a great review in *Interzone*, and there's the book on sale. No, I say, I'll wait for the paperback. And when it does appear, I may as well have bought the hardback (no doubt we can expect the same with *State of the Art*). I see this trend as blatant profiteering under the thin disguise of a fashion statement (big books for big coffee tables). I refuse to pay over the odds for bigger print, on bigger pages (and paper quality not that much improved), that at the next re-print shrinks to a sensible size/price (or worse, stays the same, but all other works by the author mysteriously swell up). If there's no shrinkage, well it's down to the library more frequently – and if enough people do that, bang goes the ol' profit margins, eh what?

I can come down off my soapbox now, feeling better for that rant, and

say thanks *Interzone* for the stories, humane and less so, and the non-fiction – I like them.

Gerald Griffith
Leicester

Dear Editors:

Thank you for issue 49. May I make a couple of points:

Firstly, I totally admire the honesty, sincerity and helpfulness of your dealings with authors. In these cynical times you set an example many editors could, and should, follow.

Secondly, your reply to Paul Campbell misses the point. He wasn't asking for a special "happy issue" of *Interzone*. To say so is patronizing. You hit the nail on the head when you ask, should you be publishing a more "humane" magazine?

In my view you should. I want to subscribe but find the tales inscrutable, full of clever chaotic invention, clever in the way of dreams and as ill-organized and finally unsatisfying. Thus, I share Campbell's view, yet am three times his age.

One glorious exception: "Frozen Heart" by Chris Beckett. I imagined I could write until I read this. It is the most perfect, thought-provoking, poetically conceived and fulfilling sf story I've ever read. If the rest of *Interzone* even halfway matched this, I'd subscribe.

But Campbell is right. John Clute's book reviews give the game away. The craving for far-out novelties, experimental writing *et al*, the urge to do away with straight storytelling that has served us ever since Homer to the glory of our literature, has done away with common sense. The satisfying logic of a taut plot, allied to a mature handling of personal emotion, are either beyond most of your contributors or are, by implication, devalued.

To give the experimental undisciplined "Baryonic Lords" pride of place, while "Frozen Heart" gets the end pages seems pointless, perverse even. If to prefer "Baryonic Lords" is to be a sf aficionado, then plainly I am not one, nor would I choose to be.

Robert Caldwell
Alfreton

Editor: We didn't view Stephen Baxter's novella "The Baryonic Lords" as experimental in the least!

Dear Editors:

No, I do not think it would be a good idea to have a happy issue of *Interzone*. Happiness is like women's writing, it is not something that needs to be put in a ghetto. Perhaps the answer is to improve the balance of the magazine – it is rather gloomy. You could have something less heavy in every issue for those simple souls like me who read sf for entertainment, not to search for deep meanings. You may say that you

do not receive that sort of writing. Might I suggest you re-read Ursula Le Guin's essay "The Stalin In the Soul"? You get glum stories because you print that sort of thing. Only beginners send you anything else, get rejected and then adjust their styles to suit editorial tastes. That's why, for example, you get so many reworkings of American history (a sub-genre, by the way, that leaves me as cold as a *snegorochka*).

When my *Interzone* comes every month from the newsagent I get a sinking feeling, rather like the prelude to an exam. I never felt like this when I bought my *Astounding* from W.H. Smith in the sixties; then I paid my half a crown with trembling hands, lent the mag to my friends. Young readers of sf don't bother to borrow my copies of *Interzone*, they're still reading and rereading anthologies from the fifties and sixties, the modern style is too arty for them to enjoy. Hence the success of the MRAA (Must Republish Asimov Again) industry and the brick-sized fantasy junk that crowds real sf off the bookstore shelves. No, I won't cancel my order, not until I've stuck at it for a year, but it would help if you made the expenditure easier to justify to my lazier self. I don't just want funny sf, I want sf that is fun, interesting, up and downbeat, sad, parodic and wonder-invoking, gloomy and tearjerking, breathtaking and nailbiting. I want the lot. That is true sf.

You, of course, know your own business best. You will have checked that subscribers do not order *Interzone* with high hopes only to drift away when they find the contents inappropriate. You will have discounted the idea that rising sales are merely a reflection of increased interest in sf which, *faux de mieux*, is met by buying your magazine, sales which could rapidly be hijacked by another, less gloomy production.

That old publisher Harold Macmillan once said "You can make people very happy by giving them what they want." Are you sure, dear Editor, that you have exactly the right product for your consumers?

Julian Flood
Bury St Edmonds

Editor: Of course we can never be sure we have "exactly the right product." And who said anything about "rising sales"! May I remind you that we have been suffering from economic recession in the past year, as has everyone else. I'm glad to say we're holding our own, more or less, but we look forward to a period of economic upturn when indeed sales may start to rise again. As for cheerful, wonder-evoking sf tales, we're happy to publish them when we can find them – but they have to be well-written and original.

Continued on page 25



CHRISTOPHER EVANS TRANSMU

Damn that boy! Where was he? Shubi surfaced from a muddled dream to the stillness and silence of her room. Grey morning light leaked in through the gaps in the window blind.

She heaved herself up on her elbows, still thinking about the boy, all too conscious that he was long gone from her life. There was a damp patch where she had been lying – she'd wet herself again!

Up you get, old woman. The bed creaked as she heaved herself off it, a horrible wheeze escaping from

the depths of her throat. She stumbled to the window, pulled the blind.

The sun was still hidden behind the clutter of terracotta roofs. Down below in the courtyard a brindle dog sniffed among a scattering of rotten tomatoes, avocado rinds, bread husks and eggshells. The morning air was chill, the cobbles slick with dew. She heard someone calling her, the words coming from afar, from long ago...



TATIONS

“Shubi! Shubi!”

Two voices, shouting as one. The twins, Jenna and Neresh.

“I’m here!” she cried.

They came scurrying through the grove, ducking under the boughs and finding her in her usual place, in the hollow next to the irrigation channel. Here it was shady, and they were safe from prying adult eyes.

They sat down at her feet, girl and boy, alike as two peas. Brown skinned, black hair cut short, both of them dressed in bleached cotton tunics. They were

her disciples, which was only fitting because they were just eight and she was ten.

“We’re ready,” Jenna said eagerly, her brown eyes bright.

Shubi played innocent. “For what?”

“The spirits, of course. What are you going to make for us today?”

“Have you brought me anything?”

Neresh delved into his trouser pocket and produced three sticks of liquorice which he hastily straightened. Shubi pocketed them ceremoniously, then

Illustrations by Kevin Cullen

nodded. Nothing pleased her more than fashioning the spirits; she would have done it without reward, but already she knew that pleasures paid for are more valued than those given free.

"No one followed you?" she asked.

"No one," they both assured her.

But it always paid to check. She climbed up on the boundary wall, peering over the tops of the orange trees. They stretched in all directions, filling the shallow valley, row after row of glossy green leaves dotted with pale blossom and bright fruit. Between the lines of trees she could see other children, diligently hoeing and weeding. The fruit would not be ripe for another month or two, but there was always work to be done, always drudgery. The adults were busy planting saplings in the new groves higher up the valley sides.

She clambered down, satisfied that no one else was near. Already she could feel the spirits gathering around her like ripples in the air, soft insistent breezes. She had always been able to sense them, far more strongly than anyone else she knew. The few adults who also felt their presence simply ignored them, and children were taught to do the same. But she, alone one evening in the fields, had suddenly had an image of an awesome and terrifying white bird descending from the sky. Something rushed through her mind, and she saw to her amazement the same white bird flicker into existence right in front of her eyes as a shiver overtook her. She'd transformed a spirit into the picture that was in her head.

Of course the bird had been small and ill-formed, and it immediately dropped to earth, bursting in the greyish dust. But that night, while her brothers and sisters slept, she'd experimented again, letting the spirits flood her mind before concentrating on an insect, one of the black weevils from the fields. Something dropped on her blanket, and she saw the weevil sitting there before she crushed it to powder in her fright.

"What are you going to show us?" Neresh asked impatiently.

"Be quiet," she said, closing her eyes and concentrating.

There were any number of things. Recently she'd created chessboard pieces in bright primary colours, none bigger than the palm of her hand, all soon turning grey and falling apart when they were handled. But she was getting better, the colours brighter and the shapes lasting longer each time.

"What are you thinking of?" Jenna whispered.

"SSSHHH!"

The spirits were all around her now, pressing in on the edges of her mind. They had no thoughts – they were just presences, urgent to be brought forth into the real world in whatever shape she wanted. All she had to do was squeeze them out with her mind.

She stretched out her arms, palms upturned, and felt their heady rush. Dimly she heard Jenna give a whoop of joy.

She knew they were there before she opened her eyes; she could feel them resting on her palms. Both balls were identical, emerald green blotched with crimson.

She offered them to the twins. If anything, they looked disappointed, not appreciating that she had never until now managed to give her creations more than a single flat colour.

Neresh took his ball and flung it casually into the air. It fell to the baked earth, exploding into an ashen cloud.

Shubi was furious.

"Give me that one back!" she said to Jenna, whose ball was already losing its colour.

She tried to snatch it from her. There was a brief struggle before the ball disintegrated between their hands.

"Witch!" Neresh shrieked. "You're a witch!"

And he and his sister ran off through the trees.

Squatting over the bowl, she relieved herself. As usual, her hip ached abominably. Where had she put her damned stick?

She had turned the mirror above the washbasin to the wall, unable to bear the sight of her face. Everything was turning yellow – teeth, eyes, skin, even her grey rats'-tails hair. She looked like the sort of hag who terrified young children.

The kettle began to sing on the hotplate. She found the stick propped up against the bottom of the bed. On the wall she'd hung a calendar, and saw that she'd ringed one of the days. That was it! That was why she'd been dreaming about the boy. Today was the opening of the exhibition.

She began scuttling about the room, wondering what she should wear. Not her cloak, even though it was the warmest thing she had; he'd recognize her easily in that. She wanted to be invisible, just part of the crowd. What then? Think, woman, think! Her long grey undergown that buttoned up from crotch to neck. The linen dress with the long skirt. Her black woollen leggings and canvas boots. And a coat? Where was the black serge one with the big collar?

Shubi! Shubi!

Stop yelling, damn you! She sat down heavily on the edge of the bed, her chest creaking like a badly hung door. If there had been anyone else in the room she would never have believed the noise was coming from her. Still the calling went on.

"Shubi! Shubi!"

Her father's voice, carrying fierce and strong from the village square above the swirling sounds of harmonica and fiddle.

Jered immediately pulled back, but she clutched him to her again.

"Don't stop now!" she whispered urgently.

He had been covering her neck with kisses, and she had bared a breast so that he could fondle it. He swallowed, looked anxious as her father shouted her name again.

"He won't find us here," she assured him.

They were on the blind side of old Ruash's barn, rampant white-flowered bushes in the wasteground shielding them. She pressed her back against an inward-sloping wall, drinking in the musky scent of the blossoms.

"Shubi! Shubi!"

The shouts were fainter, drowned by the music. Her father was heading off in the other direction.

Reassured, Jered resumed his kissing and fondling. She pushed a knee between his legs, holding him tight to her, her mind elsewhere entirely. Her parents had found the statuette of the woman with the parasol –

a stony figure that she had fashioned from the air only days before. It was her best creation so far, and when it first emerged the woman had been gaily dressed in scarlet and cream, her parasol matching. Even after the colours faded, she'd been unable to bring herself to dispose of it and had kept it under her pillow. Her mother had found it while changing the sheets.

Jered breathed heavily in her ear and kneaded her breast as if searching for something inside it. Shubi stroked his back, urged him on. She hoped she was doing it right. Sixteen, and she'd hardly ever been kissed until now. Time she took affairs into her own hands.

Of course her father had been furious. He was always making her promise to "stop conjuring those damned essences," as he called them, and she was always breaking her promise. They wouldn't leave her alone, and she couldn't leave them alone. "We're farmers," he would tell her, "workers with our hands," but the fields bored her, always had. This latest act of defiance had been the final straw for him. She was of an age now, and he'd announced that he was going to marry her off. He'd visited Malakot to arrange the examination which would establish her virginity before she was put up for marriage.

Well, Malakot would have a surprise because she wasn't going to be a virgin much longer. As soon as she knew of her father's intentions, she'd sought out Jered, who was always boasting of his conquests. She cared little for him, but he was handsome enough and about the same age as herself. When she'd asked him to meet her behind the barn at dusk he'd looked at her, amazed. Then he'd shrugged and said he'd think about it. But he was waiting for her when she arrived.

Heavenly host, all this kissing was an ordeal! Her lips felt bruised from Jered's gobbling. The carnival music swirled down from the square, and she could sense the spirits coming closer.

She supposed she was ready, though it was hard to tell whether she felt aroused or just impatient. She twisted her mouth away from his.

"Now," she said. "Get on with it."

He merely redoubled his frantic kissing. She coiled both legs around him, pulling him tighter to her. Then she freed her right hand and reached down to unbutton his shorts.

He broke free, lurching backwards, swallowing and shaking his head.

Shubi pulled herself upright. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'm not ready yet, that's all."

"What is it? I know I'm not beautiful —"

"It's not that."

He stared down at his sandalled feet, kicked at a tuft of grass. He was blushing!

She said, "You've never done it before, have you?"

"Of course I have! I've had dozens of girls."

"I'm a virgin too."

"I know you are," he said defiantly. "I can tell."

She stood up, brushing bits of hay from her skirt. "I won't say anything to anyone."

"I'm going back to watch the carnival."

She felt like whacking him across the ear.

"Why did you come?"

He tore a tall weed from the ground, flung it away.

"I thought you were going to show me something."

"Show you something? What?"

"I know what you do. With the presences. Everyone knows."

So that was the forbidden fruit he wanted! She might have known.

The spirits had thickened all around her, only too eager to be brought forth. Suddenly, maliciously, she smiled and said, "All right. I'll give you what you want."

She should never have done it, of course; it was mean and cruel. But without pausing to think, she materialized the image that was in her mind, seeing it blink into existence at head-height in the shadowed space. The flood of release exceeded any pleasure Jered could have given her.

Jered gaped when he saw it. He stumbled back as if she had hit him, called her a slut and a whore. Then he turned and ran, hurrying out of sight through a clump of bushes.

Shubi heard herself laughing, but there was little real mirth in it. The erect penis slowly began to sink towards the earth as it lost colour and turned to stone; she had fashioned it so swiftly that it had immediately begun to decay. Whistles and cheers carried from the square. Shubi snatched the floating penis, flung it down, and ground it to dust under her bare heel.

She climbed the alleyway to the square, already feeling trapped. Her father would find her a dull-witted husband who would make her cook his meals and fill her house up with children. All the talk would be of farming, and she would turn into a stupid resentful sow. And as she sank into drudgery, the spirits would abandon her for ever.

The square was filled with villagers and the gay gold and scarlet wagon of the Wanderers. They had arrived the previous morning, and Ruash let them pasture their horses in his fields. Now they were entertaining for their supper. Before her rendezvous with Jered, Shubi had watched a slab of a woman wrestle with a huge green snake. Her arms and legs were tattooed with reptilian designs so that she appeared at times to merge with the creature. Now an albino girl no older than herself was dancing with three sickly-looking apes and encouraging them to leap through hoops with urgent motions of her hands.

Shubi pushed herself to the front of the crowd just as the dance ended. She envied the girl her freedom and the bright scarves she wore. The Wanderers travelled the whole land in their wagons, and this was their first visit in over a generation. They were swarthy, black-haired folk, and the albino girl scarcely seemed one of them.

Her dance over, the girl offered to tell fortunes by reading palms. A line of villagers swiftly formed beside the seat she had taken, and Shubi was among them. She watched a strongman lift children in a water barrel and pull a cartload of hay across the square with his teeth. She scanned the onlookers' faces for her family, but there was no sign of them. Suddenly it was her turn.

She crouched before the albino and offered her hand. The girl's eyes were as pink as watered blood.

"What's your name?" Shubi asked.

The girl looked surprised. She said, "Taliko."

A big woman in crimson robes strode to the centre of the square. Her grey hair flowed down her back, tied with ribbons at its ends. There was something

about her that immediately commanded Shubi's attention.

"Who's she?" Shubi asked.

"Rosenna," Taliko told her. "She's head of our clan."

The woman was concentrating in a manner all too familiar to Shubi. Abruptly four white doves exploded from her hands, shooting up into the air and hovering around her head.

The birds looked real, their movements perfectly natural. Shubi pulled her hand away from Taliko, scarcely able to believe her eyes. The doves, spirit-creations, hung steadily in the air on beating wings. Shubi had conjured white birds herself, but she had never imagined she could give them movement.

Now the birds descended to settle on a low wall beside the temple. With a dramatic flourish, the woman brought forth a small sailing ship, carefully detailed and coloured, which bobbed through the air, making the onlookers duck as it floated by. Meanwhile the birds on the wall stiffened as their white plumage faded to grey.

Several children scrambled forward to claim the stone doves as prizes. The woman watched their squabbling indulgently, allowing the victors to carry the birds away. The crowd sounded its approval and flung coins into the collection boxes placed around the square.

The ship sailed away down the hill, pursued by a riotous crowd of infants. Rosenna succumbed to a spate of coughing, but she quickly recovered. Then, to Shubi's astonishment, she materialized a life-sized black horse with wings sprouting from its flanks. It reared into the air, its hoofs making scrabbling sounds on the cobbles.

Another wonder! Shubi had never managed to fashion anything of such a size. Whenever she tried, her creations simply dissolved away immediately they emerged. The wings were particularly splendid, each twice the span of a man's arms. They beat the air, raising dust.

The woman grasped the animal's mane, obviously intending to mount it. All around the square the crowd roared its appreciation. Shubi was suddenly furious with them. Jumping to her feet, she concentrated hard and summoned forth her own creation – an ape similar to those she had seen earlier, but pure white. She imagined it astride the horse's back, clinging tight to its mane. Her body shuddered as a spirit rushed through her.

And there it was! Rosenna stepped back in surprise. The horse spread its wings and leapt into the air.

Shubi, on thinking of the ape, had willed it to have complete powers of movement, and she was delighted to see it grip the mane and flex its legs tight around the horse's flanks as it rose high above the square, wings beating like sheets flapping in a gale.

Up and up it soared before veering back towards the square. It came plunging down, the ape clasped to its neck.

The crowd scattered from the square, for it was plain the horse was not going to stop. None of the Wanderers moved apart from the woman, who took a single step back. Shubi was transfixed; despite the danger, she noted that the colour was beginning to fade from both horse and ape as they plummeted down.

They crashed to earth in front of the temple door, scattering debris across the square. Pieces of stone struck her skirt, and gritty dust choked her eyes and throat.

She blinked her eyes clear as the dust gradually settled. The woman was still standing there, staring at her. Of the winged horse and the white ape, nothing remained except for fragments of grey rock.

The crowd slowly filtered back into the square. Shubi stepped forward.

"Was the ape yours?" the woman asked.

"Yes," Shubi said, unable to restrain a proud grin. "I want to join your clan."

The woman slapped her so hard across the cheek that she was sent reeling.

The stairs were narrow, with loose boards everywhere. Slowly. Slowly. She leaned heavily on her stick, free hand flat against the wall. Gradually she descended, pausing on each landing to catch her breath. Of course it was worse going up, and old Elula never liked having to visit her. Worse than useless he was, with his bent back and quivering hands. He gave her sleeping draughts which she never took, and told her he couldn't do anything for her unless she had complete rest. "Then get yourself out of here!" she would yell at him, and if there was a pillow at hand she'd fling it at him, sending him scurrying from the room.

There. Down at last. She limped along the dingy corridor which always stank of dogs. A hat. She'd forgotten to bring a hat. Well, it was too late to go back for it now.

She heaved open the door and shuffled out on to the street. The raw morning air knifed down her throat, making her cough so much that her eyes blurred over.

Afterwards there was a thin whining sound in her head. That she should have come to this! She used her stick to launch herself off again, thinking back to her youth, to the days of her prime.

"Shubi?"

She spun around as Taliko entered the wagon.

"Hell's bones!" she cried. "You scared the wits from me."

Taliko crept forward, squinting in the gloom. "What are you doing?"

"Packing." Her canvas pack was spread out on the bunk.

"Why?"

"I'm going to Veridi-Almar to seek my fortune."

Shubi spoke half-mockingly, but Taliko would know she was in earnest. Through the wagon's doorway the deep blue dusk was pierced by the flames of the funeral fire. Pipe music sounded a fluting anthem to the departed, and the Wanderers were dancing around the fire.

"Veridi-Almar?" Taliko said uncertainly. "Why there?"

"It's the capital," Shubi announced, as if it was a fact unknown to her friend. "There's nothing for me here now that Rosenna's gone."

Taliko looked stunned, though Shubi was sure she had known it was coming.

"But what about your act?" she said. "You know it's you they come to see most."

"You'll manage without me."

Taliko shook her head. "You can't go now."

"I have to."

"But why?"

"There's every reason. You know that as well as I do."

For a moment there was silence. Shubi folded a blouse into her bag.

"Are you leaving tonight?" Taliko asked.

"That's the plan."

"You should never travel alone by night —"

"Or cross flowing water or wear pink," Shubi mocked. "Remember when you read my palm? You told me I'd find good fortune if I was bold. I'm following your advice."

Taliko said nothing to this. Shubi held out her arms. They embraced.

"Have you told anyone else?" Taliko asked.

"Of course I haven't. They'd try to keep me here, you know that."

"Don't go. You're my only friend."

The bond between them had always been strong. Though of Wanderer stock, Taliko was an orphan, and the others tended to regard her as something of a freak, not really part of the clan. As for Shubi herself, she had never been fully accepted, despite the fact that she drew more crowds and filled money boxes faster than anyone else. They were both, in their different ways, outsiders. But Shubi had already survived a greater loss when she abandoned her family. Her ties to the Wanderers had always been looser.

"I have to go," she said simply. "I've made up my mind."

Taliko nibbled at her lower lip and bowed her head. Her hair looked like silver thread in the lamplight. Abruptly she turned and hurried out of the wagon.

Outside the music and dancing continued above the crackling fire. Shubi buckled up her bag and went down the steps. She had acquired few possessions in her eight years with the Wanderers, but then she'd had nothing except what she was wearing when she had stowed away in one of the wagons. By the time she was found the Wanderers had already left her village far behind. Rosenna must have let her stay because she was dying and needed a successor to draw the crowds.

Outside, the air was fragrant with smoke and the pines which bordered their camp. Shubi crept around the corner of a wagon to peer at the fire.

Flames blazed high and sparks billowed into the darkness as Elazar the strongman added a big fir branch. Men were dancing with women, widows with children, babies were bound tight to their mother's backs. She knew all their names now, and had shared her bed with many of the men as a price of her continued acceptance. Yet just as often the men crept to her wagon by night not to bed her but to ask for a private creation, a favoured image, which they would take away hidden under their cloaks and show to no one.

Cones popped and resin flared orange in the blaze. The music swirled about her, but she made no move to join the dance and kept herself hidden. Beyond the fire stood the dead cork oak in whose spreading



branches Rosenna was laid; embroidered scarves hung from her arms and legs. The Wanderers believed that the spirits of the air received the souls of the dead.

Shubi had endured much for the sake of Rosenna's guidance in the art of fashioning the spirits. She was determined to learn how to give her creations movement, how to make them bigger, brighter, altogether more lifelike. Rosenna gave advice only grudgingly at first, but in the end Shubi won her respect because she persisted against every discouragement. She found it hard to repeat her success with the white ape, but eventually she began to fashion beetles which twitched sluggishly, then butterflies which drifted slowly through the air. Gradually she progressed until she produced piebald bats, mottled eagles, shimmering fairy-like creatures, and finally a winged woman, almost life-sized, golden-skinned and angelic of face, which flew around the wagons for several exhilarating moments before dissolving into a dusty mist.

"It's all in the power of the vision," Rosenna told her. "The more strongly you see, the more real the creation. The harder you concentrate on bringing them forth, the longer they'll last."

This squared with her own experience. Her better creations not only lasted longer but precipitated into a harder stone when they finally lost their colour and mobility. Increasingly she began to observe things more carefully: an owl's flight across the sky at dusk, the patterns of leaves on a hawthorn bush, a smile, the way a crystal vase captured the afternoon sunlight, how reflections were fractured in flowing water. She forced herself to concentrate, holding the spirits at bay and ignoring all distractions, until she was sure that her vision was as clear and vivid as possible before she released it into the world. Frequently she knew she had fashioned something strong by the sheer power of the feelings which washed through her at the instant of creation.

Rosenna only ever offered encouragement in a negative sense. "One day you might be good," she would say; or, "I've seen worse." But then she began to insist that Shubi help her with her performances "to lighten the load"; she suffered badly from a chest complaint and frequent breathlessness. Eventually Shubi developed a repertoire which included clouds of fireflies, flurries of mist, acrobatic trolls, and a monstrous fanged head which appeared to swallow both of them before it dissolved away.

As the years passed, Shubi took over more and more of the performance until finally she began to appear alone. She delighted in the sound of coins showering into the money boxes, in the way she could play on the emotions of the villagers they entertained, in the way they gazed at her with awe and respect afterwards. But Rosenna was always quick to dampen any self-importance. "You should see the artists in Veridi-Almar," she would say. "The things they can do — it would leave you gasping." While refusing to give details, she managed to portray the capital as a bustling place where there were artists on every street corner. Sometimes Shubi was sure she invented the stories, because the Wanderers were shy of large settlements and never went near any cities. But she yearned to go to the Veridi-Almar of her imagination and compete with the best. At last the time had come.

The Wanderers were now dancing around the oak,

brandishing torches lit from the fire. Rosenna had died the previous night, leaving no instructions to the clan. Fat Velanca the Snakewoman had been chosen as her successor, and there was no love lost between her and Shubi. It was Velanca who now stepped forward to light the ends of Rosenna's scarves.

The flames raced rapidly upwards. Shubi turned away, heading off towards the dusty road along which they had travelled the previous morning. Veridi-Almar was six or seven days' walk to the south, and she had hoarded enough money to give herself a start in the city, come what may.

As she hurried past an outlying wagon, a figure stepped out, startling her. But it was only Taliko.

"That's the second time in a single evening!" Shubi said.

"You can't go," Taliko whispered with great urgency. "I've consulted the cards, and your journey isn't favoured."

Taliko's life was ruled by superstition: it had made her timid. Shubi sighed and shook her head.

"It's favoured by me," she said.

"If you travel alone, you risk death."

She looked utterly serious, though Shubi was certain she was making it up as a desperate measure.

"Taliko," she said softly, "I'm going."

"Then you mustn't travel alone."

Taliko reached behind the wagon and hauled out a travelling bag of her own. From her pocket she withdrew the silvery egg-shaped stone which was her favourite good-luck charm.

"This will help us travel safely," she said excitedly.

A thin mist shrouded the waterfront. Was it early? She'd seen no one since setting out. The Raimus lapped grey against the bank.

Many of the riverside warehouses had been demolished during the summer, and two huge stone columns rose out of the muddy black earth. As usual, no one knew what was happening, but according to rumour the Hierarch was having a great bridge built to span the Raimus, permanently linking the two halves of the capital.

A ferry rested against one of the wharves, its shallow hold filled with sacks of grain. The ferryman was about to cast off. Shubi hobbled up to him.

"I need passage across," she announced.

"I'm full," the ferryman said without looking up. "Find someone else."

"I'll perish if I have to stand here! Have you no sympathy for an old woman?"

The ferryman was young. Something told her he had a kindly nature.

"I've no money," she said. "My sister's dying, and she needs me."

His eyes narrowed. "She must be rich if she lives across the river."

"She's a servant!" Shubi snapped, mustering both irritation and outrage. She added a brief spasm of coughing, leaning heavily on her stick.

The ferryman reached out both hands to help her on board. He found her a place between two grain-sacks which snugly enfolded her.

They cast off, and the ferryman quickly became absorbed in manipulating the rudders. What a rogue she was! Inventing dying sisters and not even offering

him a single coin from her purse! She chuckled to herself. One of the few benefits of age was that it allowed you to take advantage of the young.

The mist began to lift as the ferry crossed the river. She thought she felt a breeze on the back of her head, then realized it was an inquisitive spirit. She shooped it away, deliberately blanking her thoughts. Still they tried to come, those damned spirits, even though she was all used up. They pestered her like mosquitoes, like whispered gossip that she didn't want to hear.

"Shubi?"

She looked up from her hoeing, saw no one. Then Sephea emerged from the shadows, ducking her head under the overhanging vine. She picked her way through the rows of onions and tomatoes.

"There's laundry to be delivered," she said to Shubi. "Will you take it?"

Shubi nodded, relieved to be spared further work in the garden on such a hot day.

"Thank you," Sephea said. "The mule's waiting outside."

"I'll be along shortly."

Sephea nodded and withdrew, her deep blue skirt dragging in the dusty earth.

Resting on her hoe, Shubi wiped sweat from her forehead with the back of her hand. High above, swifts swooped and glided, black darts against the blue. She liked the quietness of the garden, the sense of security provided by the stone walls which enclosed it. It was over a year since her arrival at the retreat, and only recently had she begun venturing out into the city on errands.

The hooded dark blue cloak was a gift from the Comforters. Draping it over her shoulder, she limped out of the garden and went down a cool stone corridor to one of the outer doors.

The mule was tethered to a post outside, a wicker basket strapped to its back. It was a docile beast, slow but uncomplaining. She unleashed it, led it out through the main gate.

On the street it always seemed hotter, flies buzzing everywhere, the rampant smells of the tumbledown city assailing her. Veridi-Almar was a maze of narrow winding streets and alleyways. The buildings seemed to have been thrown up with great haste, level upon level, in an entirely disorganized manner. Arcs of washing hung from windows, baskets of wilting flowers stood on ledges, palms and bright-flowered creepers on the balconies of the better-off houses. Only in the broader avenues and parks did the city seem to retreat momentarily, to allow a breathing-space. She wondered what Taliko would have made of it.

There were few people about, for it was still early, and she welcomed the relative quiet. Sometimes she was asked to visit the market, and this was always something of an ordeal, because the people here were inveterate bargain-hunters who expected a customer to haggle, whether over a silver necklace or a humble turnip.

Taliko had never reached Veridi-Almar. On their last night, in sight of the city, they made the mistake of sleeping in an open field instead of finding lodgings. To this day, Shubi was certain the men had come from the village they visited the night before, and she blamed herself for an over-ostentatious display of her

talents in the resthouse where they stayed. Her creations were too vivid and entertaining, filling their purses. Greedy eyes must have been watching them, and they must have been followed and attacked while they slept.

Even now she recalled only flashes of what happened in the aftermath. She woke in the back of a hay-cart bouncing its way along a rutted lane. The pain in her hip was such agony that she knew it was broken. Taliko lay alongside her with open eyes and a bloody mouth. She was quite dead, though her head kept lolling towards Shubi's face with every bounce of the cart, as if she was seeking a kiss. Never had Shubi felt such grief, such paralyzing terror. Then blackness claimed her once more.

When next she woke she was in bed in a cool stone room, safe in a Comforters' retreat. Those who tended her were softly spoken and kind, feeding her soup and cleaning the wounds on her limbs and body. Day upon sunlit day passed, and she recovered only slowly. But gradually her hip began to heal and the Comforters would take her for halting walks around the garden. There were others in their charge, men and women too sick or poor or old to fend for themselves.

She met the man who had saved her, an old farmer who possessed nothing except compassion. He quivered with embarrassment when she thanked him. The retreat lay in the heart of the city, but for a long time she had no interest in what was beyond its formidable stone walls. But finally, when her health returned and she was able to walk without pain, she offered to work in the vegetable garden and run errands for the Comforters to repay her debt to them.

The laundry was situated at the end of a street filled with market stalls. Shubi exchanged the basket of dirty linen for one containing freshly laundered clothes. Afterwards she paused at a stall to admire a pair of leather sandals. The woman at the stall tried to press them into her hands, but Shubi shook her head, retreating. She had no money, was entirely dependent on the Comforters' charity.

Unexpectedly, she felt a stirring in her mind, and peered across the street. Standing under an awning was a young man, his eyes closed in concentration. A small crowd was watching him. Shubi immediately knew he was a street artist preparing to perform for passersby. More strongly now, she could sense the presence of the spirits. Chimeras, they called them here, fanciful products of the mind. She felt as if they were trying to murmur secrets to her.

She hobbled on, pulling the mule after her, deliberately turning away from the man. She had avoided seeing any other artists' work since arriving in the city. It was hard enough keeping her own spirits at bay; they were becoming more insistent now that her strength was returning.

At a trickling fountain, Shubi stopped to take a drink. Her head was alive with a soft babbling. In front of her a yellow-and-green lizard was sunning itself on a whitewashed wall. Suddenly, with a rush and a flurry, a spirit surged through her, and instantly a replica of the lizard appeared under the water of the fountain bowl.

It was poorly formed, a crude imitation of the original, and entirely without movement. She was both

shocked and thrilled by it. The abrupt rush had startled her, unlocked something – a memory of Taliko displaying her good-luck stone at the rest house, a memory of one of their attackers crying: "The stone! Find the stone!" They had thought it valuable, whereas it was only a worthless piece of rock. But Taliko had died because of it.

Shubi straightened from the fountain, tears running down her cheeks. It was a moment before she could steady herself. Tugging at the mule's harness, she set off again with greater determination than before. She would return to the retreat and tell the Comforters that at last she was ready to leave.

More spirits gathered as she pushed her way through the crowds. Invisible, immaterial, they were nevertheless as restless and as real as the people who jostled her, who cursed or protested at her lumbering mule. Her mind was filled with images of Taliko – reading her palm, sharing supper with her, soaping her back, falling asleep with her head in her lap. The spirits' urgency increased, forcing her to resist them. She wanted to give herself proper pause to imagine Taliko in some favoured setting which she would reproduce as a miniature still-life, an object of memory and affection and renewal.

Panting and wheezing, she mounted the steps of the jetty and set off down the well-heeled streets where the houses of the rich and the nobility were concentrated. Here there were no scavenging dogs, no slops and dung stinking in open ditches, just clean cobbled streets and imposing stuccoed buildings huddled around inner courtyards and gardens, presenting blank walls to the outside world.

And there it was at last: Lord Orizay's town house, a castellated mansion set at the end of an avenue of beech trees.

A cluster of people were already waiting outside the entrance, and an atmosphere of restrained expectation prevailed. There was much talk of the artist's work, of his remarkable gifts. Among the crowd were people she judged as merchants and officials and perhaps even a minor lord or two; but many were commoners like herself. This pleased her, though she wondered if they would all be allowed in. As far as she knew, the exhibition was free, but it was entirely possible that they would have to pay to get in. She had a handful of coins in her purse. If necessary, she would surrender them all to get in.

A sudden breeze made her shudder, and set the dry golden leaves whispering...

"Shubi."
He hissed the word out, as if he didn't like its sound. He was tall and lean, dressed entirely in black.

"I'm Ophre," he told her. "Are you sure you've got no money?"

He was still holding out his box. She shook her head.

"I'd pay you if I could. I really liked what you fashioned."

The rest of the crowd were already melting away from the park. Ophre made a non-committal sound, as if compliments meant nothing to him. But Shubi truly had never seen anything quite like his display –

the cavorting group of obscenely caricatured lords and ladies, crudely formed but possessed with considerable powers of movement. Ophre had portrayed them as cannibals at a grotesque feast, eating the lavishly dressed bodies of poor folk, roasted and garnished on silver platters. The whole scene, only just smaller than life-size, had dissolved to nothingness a few moments before several soldiers marched into the park.

Ophre squinted at her. "You're not from the city."

Shubi shook her head, told him the name of her village.

"Are you an artist yourself?"

"I—" She was surprised he appeared to have divined this. "I used to be."

"Used to be? Is it something you cast away, like an old vest?"

She didn't know if she could explain. The soldiers were still lingering nearby, eyeing them. Ophre reached under her cloak and took her wrist.

"Come," he said. "You can tell me about it over a cup of wine."

But he got the story out of her as they walked along together, Shubi struggling with her limp to keep up with him. On leaving the retreat, she found work in the laundry, renting a room above it. In the evenings, alone in her room, she began fashioning the spirits again, producing tiny boats, houses, animals and people seen on the streets – dull, unambitious art, but necessary practice after a year of neglect. Then she visited an official exhibition of works by some of the city's most respected artists, housed in a big marble building close to the Hierarch's palace. She had emerged from the exhibition feeling crushed.

What a fool she was to have imagined she could compete with the elite! Wandering around the great halls, staring at the creations mounted on pedestals or free-floating in spaces of their own, she felt awed and dismayed. The artists had created not single figures or objects or even groups of them, but whole environments. She wandered from one to another, agog. On a raft-like mount, fleets of ships engaged on a stormy sea; overhead, angels and devils were at war in a blood-red inferno.

Size was not the object, she understood that, because none of the tableaux was larger than a tabletop. She peered closely at a fortress under siege. Evidently movement and fine attention to detail were also considered unnecessary; this scene, like all the others, was a still-life, the individual soldiers mere smears of colour, the violence compressed into a single frozen moment by swirls and stipples of light and shade.

To think that she had been so proud of her creations, her diminutive figures, her ersatz birds and beasts, her pale and stilted reflections of the city and the countryside. Compared to the exhibition works they were paltry in their ambition, crude in their execution, mere child's play.

For days afterwards she abandoned all her fashioning, working long hours in the steaming laundry before retreating to her room where she brooded until sleep overtook her. Then, as if some self-destructive demon was urging her on, she began to visit the open spaces where street-artists performed for the public. She expected to be further crushed, finally rid of her



foolish ambition to be an artist of repute. But what she found was not what she anticipated.

The street-artists performed wherever crowds might gather, and they were vigorous in soliciting payment from their audiences. Often children accompanied them to prod the watchers with collecting boxes while the display was in progress, and there were few who refused to surrender a coin or two. The artists' creations were quite unlike those she had seen in the exhibition halls: they conjured dancing harlequins in gaudy costumes, blossoming flowers of the most exotic nature, exploding fireworks which filled the air with a profusion of brilliant colours. Here the emphasis was very much on movement and small-scale vitality, on brilliant, fleeting effects. Without exception, all the creations were deliberately fashioned with an excess of ambition so that they dissolved away within minutes of their emergence, leaving nothing but dust behind.

Ophre's display was something new again, his creations seemingly designed to provoke his audiences as much as entertain them. Shubi did not know what to make of it all.

Ophre listened in silence while she jabbered out her story. He hurried her along winding streets, occasionally glancing back over his shoulder. Shubi was certain he was checking that the soldiers weren't following them.

At length he paused on the corner of a small square. He gripped both her wrists and peered hard into her face.

"Let me tell you something," he said with a soft vehemence. "Those displays you saw at the gallery, they were nothing. *Nothing*. Official art, that's all, grandiose glorifications of slaughter. The artists who created them were donkeys, nodding their heads to their masters' orders. They're celebrated because they're approved, not because they're good. Their work is obscene, it achieves nothing but a fawning grandiloquence. We're opposed to everything they stand for."

She had never before heard art discussed with such passion.

"We?" she said.

Without answering, he yanked her across the square towards an open-fronted building with a gilded lantern hanging above it. No one was sitting at the tables outside, but there was plenty of activity beyond the beaded curtain.

Before they went in, Ophre told her that he and like-minded artists were interested in art for everyone, in works which illuminated, however fleetingly, the grey lives of the common people who laboured under the oppressive rule of the Hierarch Andrak and all his servants. By satirizing public figures, they hoped to highlight injustices with the aim of stirring the hearts and minds of the common people. They wanted to help them recover their dignity, courage and their yearning for justice so that ultimately they might rise up and overthrow those who oppressed them. Their art was a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Ophre pushed aside the curtain and drew her inside. The place was filled with heat and arguments, packed with a host of jabbering, gesticulating figures. Shubi immediately knew she had found a home.

Hell's bones, it was cold! She couldn't feel her feet, and her hands were turning white over the nub of her stick.

"Here, old woman."

A young man, poorly dressed and unshaven, was thrusting a jug of spiced wine at her. She took it from him, leaning back against the wall and wrapping both hands around it. Her stick clattered on the cobbles, but a woman retrieved it for her. Possibly she was the man's wife, or perhaps his sister. Both had a similar stamp of poverty on them.

"He's late," the man remarked. "What if he doesn't come?"

"He'll be here," Shubi assured him.

She gulped at the wine, feeling it burn through her. It sloshed around in the bottom of the jug as she thrust it back at the man.

"Finish it off," he said. "You look as if you need it."

He would come, she was sure of that. This was his first major exhibition, the breakthrough long anticipated and now finally at hand. Everything lay before him now; nothing could stand in his way provided he kept his head.

She'd had her own moment of glory once, many years ago. For him it would be more lasting, she was sure. His gift was so exceptional only madness or death could deny it.

"Shubi! Shubi!"
Ophre and the others were beckoning her out on to the stage. She shook her head, retreating into the wings, clutching her cloak around herself.

Ophre strode after her. "What's the matter?"

"I can't do it."

"Of course you can."

She shook her head again.

He gripped her arms. "It's easy. Once you get out there, the fear goes away."

She wished she could believe the assurance in his voice.

"I'll never be able to concentrate."

"It's only people. Ordinary people like us."

She peered out at the crowd assembled in the park. A thin autumn rain was falling, but the people had turned out in force. Most of them were commoners, the city's poor. So far the demonstration had been a great success, with Ophre and other artists conjuring a series of prancing stereotypes of the military and nobility, much to the delight of everyone.

"There isn't a soldier in sight," Ophre remarked.

"I know. I'm not afraid of them."

The fact that they had been allowed to construct a crude stage overnight without hindrance seemed to indicate a lack of leadership in the Hierarchy. Andrak had died only two days ago, and his son and successor, Jormalu, was only a young man, who had been pampered by his father. The movement to which the artists at the Golden Lamp were attached had decided on a mass demonstration and celebration in Temple Park, the city's largest, and word of mouth had brought people from all over Veridi-Almar to watch the scabrous entertainments and listen to inflammatory speeches.

"You can't turn back now," Ophre insisted. "You'll always regret it."

Still she hesitated. She had already told him of the creation she planned to fashion for the event. Since her association with him her creations had acquired a new complexity, become less idealized and more reflective of people's lives. She could not possibly let him down now.

Pushing past him, she limped out on to the stage. It was rickety and slick with moisture, and she prayed she wouldn't fall.

The inspiration for her creation had come from a fortuitous incident. Several days before, after a morning spent putting creases into fine gowns and tunics, she went walking and found herself in the big square opposite the High Temple. There were soldiers everywhere, holding back a curious crowd.

Presently a robed priestess emerged from the temple. She was accompanied by a squat man swathed in plum and cream silks. It was none other than Andrak's son and successor.

Jormalu had reached full manhood, but his smooth face retained the plumpness of childhood indulgence. His father was lying in state inside the temple, and he had evidently been paying his respects. After bidding farewell to the priestess, he motioned to a soldier, who led forward a huge black horse.

The horse was far larger than any of his cavalymen, and he needed the assistance of two soldiers to haul himself up into the saddle. As he rode off in all dignity across the square, he looked absurd.

Shubi studied her audience as the spirits gathered around her. There were people perched in trees, people clustered on the autumn green grass, on the roofs and balconies of the houses bordering the park. All were heedless of the rain, and all were waiting.

Her head filled with a gush of spirits as she closed her eyes and concentrated on the image of the enormous black horse with the tiny Jormalu on its back. She added a few flourishes, emblazoning the words **THE PEOPLE** across the buttocks of the beast and making Jormalu grossly fat and spindly limbed, his face consumed with terror.

She felt an overwhelming surge of release, and opened her eyes to see her creation blink into existence centre-stage. It was full of colour and detail and life. She could almost smell the sweat on the horse's flanks, see the veins in its eyeballs, hear the whimper in Jormalu's knotted throat. It was exactly as she had imagined it.

The horse reared and bucked, throwing the helpless young Hierarch right off the stage into the mud in front of it. The crowd erupted with approval.

Both horse and Hierarch dissolved away a few moments later, but still the cheering went on. Staring into the wings, Shubi saw Ophre and several other artists grinning and applauding. For the first time in her life, she felt completely fulfilled.

Then she heard a sound above the cheers – a rumbling, thunderous sound. The crowd surged, and people began shouting with alarm rather than approval as horsebacked soldiers burst from every street and alleyway around the park.

Preceded by a great clattering, the carriage turned into the avenue.

The crowd immediately drew itself up. Drawn by two piebald horses, the carriage was black

with gold trim. Heavy embroidered drapes hung on its windows.

It ground to a halt outside the house. Steam rose from the horses' flanks. Two coachmen jumped down from the front and began marshalling the crowd until there was a corridor to the house's entranceway. Then the carriage's doors were opened.

The Lady Orizay was the first to emerge. She was an elegant and icily attractive woman of middle years, dressed in deep red silks, her fiery hair cropped short. Lord Orizay followed, a suave and handsome man with a sallow complexion and hair that gleamed with oil. He wore a flounced black tunic.

And finally the artist himself. Shubi found herself retreating, making sure that others were hiding her from sight. Here he was, a preposterous pink cloak draped over his shoulders, modelled in style after the dark blue one she had worn for years. He was as handsome as ever, fully the young man now, approaching the peak of his physical prime, at the beginning of a glorious career. And he had lost none of his charm, nodding and smiling and taking people's hands to kiss as Lord and Lady Orizay led him forward, up the steps.

Lord Orizay paused in the open doorway to address the crowd.

"We shall need a few minutes to ensure that everything is in order inside. I trust we can rely on your indulgence. You will all be admitted as soon as possible."

Then the house swallowed up all three, the door closing heavily behind them.

"**S**hubi!" She could still hear his prim nasal voice calling up the stairs as she was busy changing the sheets on his bed. A pomegranate. The damned fool had sent her out for a pomegranate.

Shubi haggled absent-mindedly with the stallholder, a plump fruit already in her hand. Around her the market-place seethed with people, the air heavy with trodden peaches and mangoes. The evening was hot and airless, and she quickly tired of bargaining. Surrendering some coins, she retrieved her stick and pushed off through the crowd.

The stick was useful for prodding people who stood in her way, though it was scarcely consolation for the perpetual ache in her hip. She slipped the pomegranate into the pocket of her cloak, aware that she had paid twice the price Begalket had ordered. He was such a miser, that man, a miser and a prig. She had been his housekeeper ever since her return to Veridi-Almar, and she had developed a thorough dislike of him and all his spoiled pupils.

A horse-drawn cart loaded with grapes trundled by, only narrowly missing her. She crossed the street and began climbing an alleyway, her breath rattling in her throat. It wasn't the quickest way back, but she needed to get out of the heat and the noise. Since her exile, she found too great a press of people unbearable.

A pomegranate. That petulant brat Erice had insisted she wanted one, and of course Begalket was instantly ready to oblige her. No doubt the fact that her father was a minor official in the Hierarchy made him more than usually eager to please her.

She turned a corner, found the sun in her face, headed up another narrow street. Presently she came

upon a small square which she recognized immediately.

Directly opposite her on the corner was a large booth selling lottery tickets. The ornate lantern and the outside tables were gone, but there was no mistaking what had once been the Golden Lamp.

She continued on without pause, stick knocking on the hard-packed earth. The survivors of those days were in hiding, and they were few. Of Ophre and his closest friends, nothing was known. Most likely they had been murdered and their bodies disposed of.

When the soldiers invaded the park she had been knocked down by a horse and woke crammed into the back of a wagon with a dozen other women. They were part of a convoy, heading south. Many days later they arrived in the rainforest where Jormalu was having a winter palace built. There they were put to work serving food for the male prisoners who hauled the stones from nearby quarries. They lived in insanitary tents, and sickness was rife. Among the prisoners was another young artist, a young man arrested for fashioning coins. A thick scar down one temple was the relic of a knife-thrust which had turned him into a speechless docile idiot.

Days and months blended into one another in a meaningless haze of illness and exhaustion. Her hip worsened in the humid climate until she could only walk with the aid of a stick. The summer palace was a grand project which would take years to complete. There were no seasons in the jungle, and hope of release drained out of her until she lost track of how long she had been in exile.

Then, one morning, she and the other women were bundled into wagons once more. Shubi was certain they were being taken to a place of execution; but instead they began the long journey back to Veridi-Almar. Jormalu had declared an amnesty for all criminals to celebrate the birth of his first son. The wagons took them to the outskirts of the city, and then they were set free.

Five years had passed. Her old room was occupied, but for once luck was with her. The caretaker let her sleep in a storeroom and share his food. He knew of a man, he said, a tutor to the children of the rich, who was seeking a woman to tend his house. He would recommend her if she wished.

Shubi seized the opportunity. Begalket condescended to take her on as his housekeeper after only the briefest of interviews. She soon discovered why. He was scrupulous to the point of fanaticism about neatness and cleanliness, forever running his fingers over furniture and peering under chairs to ensure she had left no trace of dust. He paid her only a pittance, yet expected her to work from dawn to midnight. All his previous housekeepers had soon become exasperated and left his employ.

But Shubi found advantages in her situation. Begalket gave her a small attic room where she lived rent-free, and she performed her duties stoically while he sat in his study with a succession of children from well-heeled families who had been sent to him to have their minds improved. For Shubi, the quietness of the house and the mindless nature of her duties were a blessing; having lost all ambition, she was blissfully free of expectation. What she craved most was a life of peaceful solitude.

Yet she was not entirely alone. During the rigours of her exile, she had had no strength or inclination to practise her art and grew oblivious of the spirits. Since her return, they had begun to make their presence felt. But she was obdurate in refusing to entertain them; they were a part of her life which she now considered closed.

Where the devil was she? She looked up and down the unfamiliar street, certain she should have known it but not recognizing anything. She climbed a short flight of steps, paused to watch three children chasing one another around an old stone pillory. Then onwards, stick tapping, chest rattling.

Here the tall overhanging buildings blocked out the sun. Rubbish was strewn everywhere, and the stink from the gutters was overwhelming.

A breeze seemed to spring up, and she shuddered, stopping in her tracks.

Another cluster of children were sitting on a flight of steps outside one building. All were young, grubby, dressed in ragged clothes. One of them, a boy of about ten with hair as blonde as wheat, was entertaining the others with a display of brightly coloured scarves which whirled and swooped in the air above his head.

Shubi shuffled forward, still staring. There was no wind in the street, but the souging in her ears grew stronger. The scarves were silken, their colours brilliantly rich crimsons, purples, deep greens and golds. They spun and flapped and spiralled around one another, then burst effortlessly apart.

The boy was a beautiful bronzed child despite the green pearl with drooled from one nostril and the griminess of his rough linen shirt. His teeth gleamed as he smiled, enjoying the attentions of his friends. At the same time he was hardly concerned with what he had created, not looking up once as the scarves continued their hectic dance. Chimeras swirled and raged invisibly around him. In all her years she had never seen such intensely vivid and energetic art-forms.

The children became aware of her, and the boy leapt up, thrusting out his hand.

"Did you do that?" Shubi asked, knowing full well he had.

He nodded, palm pleading for a coin.

"What's your name?" Shubi asked, finding it hard to keep the excitement out of her voice.

"Neni. I want money for supper."

Shubi reached out and seized his wrist, now possessed with the certainty that her life had taken yet another turn.

"Money?" she said, and cackled. "Money?" She pulled a handkerchief from her cloak pocket and swabbed his nose. "You want money?" He wriggled in her grip, trying to break free. She held him firm, held him hard. "I'm going to give you much more than money, boy!"

She moved slowly around the hall, studying the exhibits, always keeping a crowd between herself and the recess where the artist was receiving the congratulations of his audience. The sun was now shining in through the windows, flooding the place with light.

He had not failed her, not in the least, even though the exhibition was like nothing she had anticipated.

Its theme was a simple one – Love – and he had produced a series of life-sized nudes and family portraits of parents and children. Some of the poses were erotic, but none were obscene. In one, he had even introduced a note of macabre whimsy, depicting a man about to behead with an axe a woman wrapped against the body of her lover on a turbulent sea of white sheets.

Religious convention did not permit completely mobile human figures, but many of the exhibits had been given gentle movement, often to sensuous effect. All were remarkably lifelike. She knew no other artist who could fashion the human form so accurately, with such realism: some of the figures could hardly be distinguished from the people who were gazing at them.

When she thought no one was looking, she touched the flank of a child holding the disembodied arm of its father. The flesh was cold, but it yielded to her touch just like real flesh. He had given all the creations full solidity, and they were so well formed they would probably keep their colour and movement for months or even years. And when they finally turned to stone, it would be hard and durable, like granite or marble. They would become statues, attaining a different kind of lasting beauty.

She glanced at him again and saw him sharing a few private words with Lady Orizay, their faces close to one another. He called himself Vendavo now, a grander, more imposing name, though to her he would always be Neni. Love. It was not the theme she had expected of him, not at all. It made his creations even more remarkable that they sprang from a mind which she was not sure had ever experienced the real meaning of the word.

"Shubi... Shubi..."

He was whispering into her face, his breath rank. She closed her eyes, doing her best to breathe in without wheezing as he flailed away at her on the creaking bed. She couldn't remember his name, and was surprised he was using hers. Most called out other names, the names of wives and lovers, of those they despised yet had to possess.

The way he was going at it, it would soon be over, praise fortune. Better get him out before Neni returned from his lessons, otherwise the boy would start asking awkward questions. Of course he probably knew full well how she supported the two of them; he had an old head on his shoulders and was a charmer with women himself. But she didn't want him walking in with her legs still spread wide.

A strenuous grunt, and then he slumped, crushing her with his stale-sweat body. Hell's bones, most of them didn't even bother to wash! She could feel him shrivelling inside her while his heart throbbed triumphantly against her breast. She moved, and he slipped out of her. Then he rolled away.

She sat up, reaching for her skirt.

"How much?" he asked.

She repeated the amount they had negotiated at the start. He rummaged in his shirt, his back to her, and finally put a few notes down on the bed. He dressed quickly and departed without another word.

Six grubby notes lay on the bed; he'd left her a tip! She rolled them up and wedged them into the gap



above the door lintel. Then she boiled water and washed herself thoroughly.

An unguarded glimpse of her reflection in the mirror startled her, as if she was seeing her face for the first time in years. With her sagging skin and greying hair she was turning into a scarecrow. Little wonder that most of her customers were equally wretched; her limp and wheeze didn't help.

She tidied the bed, then opened the blind to let in the air. Below in the courtyard three boys were tormenting a ginger cat. She yelled at them, and they scampered away down the alley. They looked as waif-like as Neni the first time she'd encountered him. Five years on, he was becoming quite a cultured young man, though the shrewdness of the streets would never leave him.

Half the money she earned went on Begalket's fees, but it gave her great satisfaction to be his paymaster rather than him hers. And of course the boy was receiving a steady education into the bargain; as much as she loathed Begalket, she knew he was a good teacher, and the boy would learn discipline from his fussiness into the bargain. Without her, he'd probably still be on the streets, doing brilliant but fleeting creations for unappreciative passersby. Or he might have ended up with a blade through his temple and his gifts extinguished for ever.

She put a pot of rice on the hot plate, added barley and the scraps of mutton she'd scavenged from one of the stalls at the market. Neni could have those; meat tended to make her bilious these days.

She'd been determined to have the boy for her own. He wouldn't tell her where he lived, but the other children – his brothers and sisters it turned out – took her upstairs. She met the father, a slovenly man in a grimy vest who looked like a child-beater, and the mother, morose and apathetic. They cared nothing for their son's talents, and so Shubi made her offer there and then. She would take the boy and raise him herself.

The parents debated only briefly, and it was clear to her that they considered the boy just another mouth to feed. Finally the father said that they would agree to hand the boy over to her, if they were compensated. She offered them half her savings, money wrung like blood from Begalket's stony heart. They began to haggle, and finally settled for half as much again.

The boy said nothing throughout this. She took him aside and asked him if he was aware of the strength of his gift. He shrugged. So she proceeded to tell him how his life might be transformed if he allowed his abilities to be developed under the guidance of someone who could also fashion chimeras, someone like herself. She could turn his raw talent into a finely tuned art, bring him wealth and fame, make him the envy of everyone in the city.

No doubt she oversold her case, for she knew better than anyone that there were no certainties in her profession. But the potential was undoubtedly there. And the boy's blue eyes widened as she painted his glorious future. She could tell that he already possessed a strong streak of independence and self-assurance, and he did not even bother to glance at his parents before saying that he would go with her.

She gave Begalket her notice that very day, and used what remained of her savings to rent rooms where

she and the boy could live. And then his education began in earnest. Shubi was determined to improve his mind as well as his creative gifts, and she offered to spend her mornings cleaning Begalket's house if he would in exchange give the boy free lessons. Begalket, hard to please though he was, knew that she had given him good service, and grudgingly agreed to the proposition.

But now she was left with the problem of finding money for them to live. So, when the boy was at his afternoon tutorials, she took men into her bed. She had never been a beauty and was physically well past her prime, but there were always those who wanted the services she was prepared to render. She could not have earned as much money in any other way.

In the evenings, she practised with the boy, teaching him all the fundamentals of concentration, patience, imagination and control. He had an exceptionally vivid mind, but it was quite undisciplined. She would set him exercises, asking him to fashion something which she knew might give him difficulty. He liked to think boldly, in strong colours, with lots of movement, so she encouraged him to produce still-lives, objects in pastel shades, to replicate unhurried movements like the billowing of clouds, someone stirring from sleep, a caterpillar moving along a leaf-stalk, smoke from a fire rising on a still day. He tended to visualize in a broad dramatic way and was sometimes neglectful of subtle detail. She took him to the High Temple and made him stare at it for an entire morning, studying every corner and crevice, every facet of its rich ornamentation, before taking him home and demanding he reproduce it in miniature. She made him do it several times until she was satisfied with the result.

He hated the exercises, the strictures she was constantly imposing on him. And at first he was easily daunted, flying into a temper or descending into sullenness if he failed to achieve what she wanted. But at the same time she could sense his growing ambition, his desire to perfect his art, his determination to measure up to whatever standards she set. For Shubi it was the most exciting time of her life.

Eventually she began taking him into parks and squares to perform for others. There he produced some remarkable creations – complex crystalline shapes which spun and cartwheeled over the crowds' heads, intensely localized storms and blizzards which made them reel back in alarm, characters and creatures and scenes and situations more vivid and lifelike than any she had ever seen before. All his creations were designed for a brief brilliance before they faded into dust; she trained him to do it that way, knowing that the authorities disliked street artists cluttering up the parks and public places with stony residues of their displays. The crowds looked on in silent wonder, some admiring, many perplexed. Few offered coins, and most drifted away with a disgruntled air. Shubi became convinced that they considered the boy too young for his gifts. They were not prepared to shower their adulation on a child unless someone gave them a precedent. And no precedent was forthcoming.

But Shubi persevered, comforting and cajoling the boy whenever he became downcast. Sooner or later you'll be recognized, she would tell him; sooner or

later your time will come. He had the resilience of youth, and there were other compensations. He remained a very handsome boy, and women of all ages were easily beguiled by his brilliant smile, his azure eyes, the eyes of an angel. Often he came home late from Begalket's, usually, Shubi suspected, because of liaisons with girls whose hearts he doubtless broke quite effortlessly. She couldn't really begrudge him such dalliances, because she worked him hard at all other times. He also kept in contact with his brothers and sisters, but never to her knowledge visited his parents again.

She battled on against all frustrations, but still no one would recognize the boy's talents. Then the Hierarchy enacted a series of small reforms, one of which involved the opening of galleries where street artists could show their work, providing that it had no "dangerous" content. Well, the boy was not politically minded at all, and she increased her quota of men until she had sufficient money to rent a gallery near the Waterfront where a selection of the boy's latest creations was displayed for several days.

There were a respectable number of visitors, some of them wealthy folk whom Shubi did her best to persuade to become the boy's patrons. But while most were genuinely admiring of his prowess, none were actually prepared to use their money and influence to promote his career. Like the crowds in the park, they lacked the courage of their instincts.

Still, the exhibition had not been a total loss. It had broadened the audience for the boy's work, and Shubi was already saving hard for another. In the end, someone would "discover" him, she was convinced. A talent like his could not be denied for ever.

The rice was cooked, and she took the pot off the hot plate. Outside, dusk was encroaching, and she lit an oil-lamp, her shadow looming on the wall. She sat down to wait. And to wait. She'd bought an old doorless wardrobe where she kept a selection of his work, still-lives and miniatures. Figures and scenes so finely wrought she sometimes found it hard to believe that the boy had created them, even though she'd been there at the time. His larger, more mobile works were given away to friends and acquaintances or simply vanished of their own accord, some drifting out through the window to disappear over the rooftops. Shubi would sometimes imagine them floating down quiet streets, hovering in squares, drawing astonished gazes from people who knew nothing of their creator. The boy seldom showed much interest in them once they were finished; the act of creation was far more important to him than the end product.

It had been a hard day, Begalket at his most demanding, a succession of customers manhandling her all afternoon. She turned the oil-lamp up against the darkness. Sooner or later the boy would come. She closed her eyes, dozed.

A creaking on the stairs awoke her, and she immediately recognized Neni's tread. Relief swept her weariness away. The door opened and he walked in.

He was a young man now, childhood almost entirely gone from his face. He wore a clean sand-coloured tunic and strong leather boots; she always made sure he was properly dressed. But there was something uncharacteristically hesitant in his

manner. He lingered on the threshold, the door still open.

"You're late," she remarked.

"I had to see someone."

He wasn't looking at her. She reached for her stick, said, "Oh?"

A woman entered. She was about five years older than Neni, blonde like him, attractive in a rather brittle way. An expensive embroidered gown swathed her slender body. Her face seemed familiar, but Shubi couldn't place her.

"This is Leraïne," Neni said. "Remember her?"

Shubi leant on her stick, still sitting. The name meant nothing.

"We met at the exhibition," the woman said, her tone polite but formal.

Shubi remembered. She had come to the exhibition and had lingered for some hours, admiring Neni's work and also spending time in conversation with him. Her father had some sort of minor position in the Hierarchy, she couldn't recall what. The family would be moderately well-off and comfortable, but not so influential that Shubi had thought it worthwhile propositioning her for a patronage.

A look passed between Neni and Leraïne, and Shubi immediately understood that the two of them were lovers. They had probably been so since the exhibition. But there was more.

"Neni is extremely talented," Leraïne remarked.

"Indeed," Shubi agreed. "It's a shame we haven't yet convinced more people of that fact."

"Perhaps he needs better connections."

Shubi rose from her chair, taking her time over it. Neni was looking at her now, but there was a blankness in his eyes, a shutting down and cutting off.

"You may well be right," Shubi said to Leraïne. "Do you have something to propose?"

"We love each other," Leraïne said bluntly.

Shubi was still looking at Neni, and she was sure of another thing: he would not have used the word "love" to describe whatever there was between them. But he held his peace, showing a sudden interest in one of the figures on his wardrobe shelf.

"He's met my parents," Leraïne went on, "and they all admire one another. Father agrees with me about his gifts and agrees that his work should be better known."

Shubi could imagine the boy charming them with his glittering smile and dazzling eyes.

"Is your father proposing to become his patron?" she asked.

"Were we wealthy he'd have no hesitation," Leraïne replied, "but unfortunately that isn't possible. However he is prepared to provide him with rooms where he can live and work."

"Ah," said Shubi. "So you're proposing he move in with you."

"We're all agreed that it would be for the best."

Shubi turned to Neni. "Are you agreed?"

He replaced the figurine he had been holding.

"Leraïne and I want to be together, and we have her parents' blessing." He gave her his best smile. "I can't thank you enough for everything you've done for me. I know it's been hard, and I can't expect you to keep giving up everything for my sake. This way it will be easier for all of us."



Effortless words, sugared by his smile. Shubi wanted to laugh at the suggestion that he was doing it for her. She wanted to scream at him, to say that he owed her everything. He hadn't even had the courage to tell her himself but had let the woman do it for him.

She said nothing, offered not the slightest hint of an objection. A part of her had always known that something like this might happen. It had come more abruptly, more shockingly, than she had anticipated, but she was too weary for the fight. Let him go, she thought, steadying herself on her stick; you could never keep him anyway. The rice would be cold by now. Let him go.

"Then," she said softly, "you have my blessing."

He came forward and embraced her, murmuring his thanks, his promise to visit her regularly. Meanwhile Leraïne looked on with relief and triumph.

Lord Orizay clapped his hands, bade the crowd pay attention.
"Vendavo would like to say a few words to you before we leave."

The crowd, respectfully subdued in any case, became positively hushed. The artist rose to address them.

"I don't have much to say," he began. "I deal in visions, not words. But I'd like to thank every one of you for coming today. You are the people who've made this exhibition a success. I'd also like to express my deepest gratitude towards Lord and Lady Orizay for sponsoring me and allowing me the use of their beautiful house for the display. Without their support, none of this would have been possible."

A glance back at the two, smiles between all three. Lord Orizay held a senior position in the Hierarchy, and his wife had long been a collector of chimera art. She was also reputed to have a powerful appetite for young lovers. It had taken Neni less than a year to make himself known to them through the intermediary of Leraïne's father; soon they were actively promoting his career. He was still not formally recognized as an official artist – his work was too brilliant and unpredictable for that – but apparently Jormalu did not look unfavourably on it and put no obstacles in the way of the exhibition.

Rumour had also reached Shubi that Leraïne had tried to kill herself after Neni deserted her for Lord Orizay's household. Her father had later married her off to a wine-merchant, and she was now carrying their second child. Life was simply unstoppable.

"There's one other person I'd like to thank," the artist was continuing. "A woman none of you will have ever heard of. She took me off the streets when I was young and cared for me. She was an artist herself, and she taught me how to harness my gifts. Without her care and guidance, I would never have achieved anything worthwhile."

Shubi was convinced he knew she was in the hall. He was going to name her, point her out to the crowd. She tried to shrink in on herself, to hide from sight.

"She's dead now. A fever took her, and she passed away in my arms some years ago. I'd like to dedicate this exhibition to her memory."

Applause rang in her ears. She felt herself teetering on her stick, but clung on with every shred of her strength. She still had all his old works in her room.

They would be valuable now, but she'd never sell any.

The crowd began to retreat as Neni, flanked by Lord and Lady Orizay, was shepherded towards the exit. Shubi suddenly realized she was directly in their path. She tried to move back, but the crowd wouldn't let her. Her stick wobbled, then slid away as she went crashing to her hands and knees, right in front of him.

He halted, but three retainers swept in front of him and hauled her to her feet. The crowd had their arms outstretched and he began grasping their hands, his attention already diverted as she was bundled to a chair. She caught a final glimpse of his hair, like a flash of sunlight, as he swept through the exit to the waiting coach.

Christopher Evans last appeared in *Interzone* with "Artefacts" (issue 23), to which the above story is a prequel. The two pieces plus others will be collected in his new book *Chimeras*, forthcoming from Harper Collins in 1992. His earlier novels include *Capella's Golden Eyes* (1980), *The Insider* (1981) and *In Limbo* (1985), and he co-edited the three *Other Edens* anthologies with Robert Holdstock. Chris, who lives in West London and works as a teacher, is now finishing up a new sf novel.

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"Oh!" Carroll

Dave Hughes talks to Jonathan Carroll

"What are your earliest memories?" was the first question Fanny Neville asked me, the day we met and did our interview years before. I hadn't even had the chance to sit back down after letting her in.

Without thinking, I said, "Seeing Sputnik and Rocket Monroe at the Luxor Baths in New York."

"How old were you?"

"Three, I think."

"Who were Sputnik and Rocket Monroe?"

"Professional wrestlers."

— architect Harry Radcliffe being interviewed in *Outside the Dog Museum* by Jonathan Carroll

“What are your earliest memories?” was the first question I asked him, the day we did our interview.

Without thinking, he said, “Falling out of my crib and crawling downstairs to watch television with my parents. I climbed onto one of their laps and ate oatmeal. I was very happy about it.”

A brief conversation with award-winning author Jonathan Carroll quickly establishes him as a man of many rare qualities. He is serious-minded yet good-humoured; worldly-wise yet not cynical; unforgivably talented yet charmingly modest. Harry Radcliffe, architect protagonist of Carroll's acclaimed new novel *Outside the Dog Museum*, would probably describe him as “soft.” Carroll describes Harry Radcliffe as “an asshole.”

Born the son of Hollywood screenwriter Sidney Carroll (who penned *The Hustler*) and his actress wife, Carroll grew up in New York and Los Angeles, where his “troubled” teenage years were straightened out with the discovery of books and writing. He left the U.S. for Europe almost twenty years ago (after being offered teaching jobs in Tehran, Beirut and Austria), teaching at an international school in Vienna before becoming a full-time writer three years ago. A sensitive and intensely private man, the “biography” on the back of *Outside the Dog Museum* (“Jonathan Carroll lives in Vienna”) says much more about him than the sum of its words. He once said that the reason he so rarely gives interviews is that he was once a journalist and knows how words can be twisted “to suit the interviewer's own ends.”

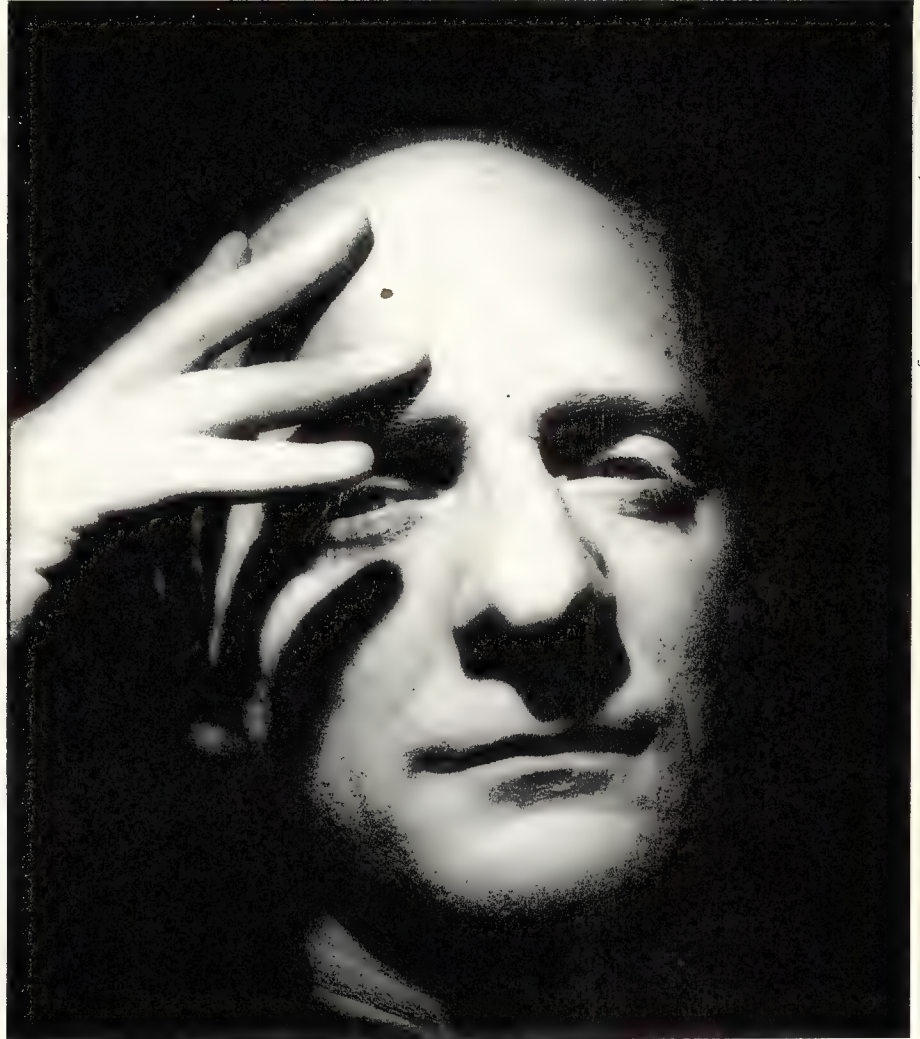


Photo of Jonathan Carroll by Bela Borsodi

Allowed a rare glimpse into the mind of the man once described by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as “possessing both a distinctive artistic vision and the talent to make that vision come fully to life on the page,” what, I asked him, are his “own ends”?

“A friend of mine said that most authors write for the head or for the stomach, in terms of the intellect or the emotion. The compliment that he paid me that has always made me smile is that he said I write for the ‘Oh!’ reaction, where people come to a certain point in my books and say ‘Oh!’ like a punch in the stomach.”

There are, of course, other writers who achieve the ‘Oh!’ reaction partly through the use of magic – Gabriel

Garcia Marquez, for one, but why should Carroll be considered (by many, though not by me) a “genre” writer?

“I don’t know,” he says, slightly despairingly. “I don’t think I write ‘in genre.’ I don’t like to be considered a fantasy writer or a science-fiction writer or anything like that. I’m a writer. In reviews of my books, people often say things like ‘He’s such a literary writer, and yet he puts in all this fantasy stuff.’ The point is that we’re all storytellers, and if we choose to include angels and talking pigs or whatever, well, okay, but let’s talk about the story. This kind of comment has gotten me into trouble over the years because people say I’m putting

down fantasy, which I'm not – I like it a lot when it's well done, but then I like any kind of writing when it's well done, whether it be Tolstoy or Harlan Ellison. I'm just as much a reader as a writer, and as a reader, if a book is good, why shouldn't it have magic in it?"

And as a writer? "As a writer, my bent is that if I touch the 'Oh!' part of you, I'm happy. In some ways, I'm writing fairy tales for adults. And I say that with a smile, and not hesitantly. My fur goes up when I hear, 'Well, you have magic in your books so therefore you're a genre writer.' No-one calls Marquez a 'genre' writer."

And Marquez gets the Nobel Prize rather than the World Fantasy Award (which Carroll won for *A Child Across The Sky*). "Well," says Carroll, picking up the new topic with relish, "I always feel that awards are a little two-faced. On one hand, it's always nice to get recognized, but at the same time you put a false importance on them, so that if you lose, you're suddenly saying, 'What did I do wrong?', when you should be saying, 'What did I do right?' My stuff gets nominated a lot, but that's not always good because I have the kind of ego where if I lose I say, 'What did I do wrong?' instead of, 'Well they chose another guy.' I know that's not a healthy attitude and I want to get over it, but I haven't got there yet."

Jonathan Carroll's work first came to my attention shortly after I met him at the 1988 World Fantasy Convention. I remembered his name from an interview I had conducted the previous year with James Herbert, when the horror writer praised *The Land of Laughs* to the skies. "It was the first time I had heard one writer applaud another's work so strongly (I later learned that both Stephen King and Thomas Harris have written "fan" letters to Carroll). A full two years later I passed a copy of *Sleeping in Flame* to a friend, only to have it returned two days later with the comment that he had had a good weekend "mainly due to that book." Then I wondered how Carroll would have felt about that. Now I ask him.

"People are very polarized with my books," he says. "They either love them or hate them, there's never any in-between. People have aggressively come up to me and said, 'I really didn't like that book' – particularly *Bones of the Moon*. It's almost like I did something immoral to them by, quote, 'making' them read it. But better to get strong polarized reactions than, 'Yeah, I read it. It was okay.' Luckily most of the reactions I hear personally are pretty positive, and I'm very touched by that. You know, 'I stayed up late reading your book,' or, 'You made me miss the train.' That's what we write for."

Moving the subject from readers' reactions to their gender, I explain that after reading *A Child Across The Sky*, I bought several copies and passed them onto various female friends, who reacted in a surprisingly negative way to what remains one of my three all-time favourite books. Not intending sexism, I ask Carroll if he thinks that his books are as likely to appeal to women as men.

"It's funny," he says, "but I've always thought of my books as either masculine or feminine, and I don't mean that in terms of, 'This is a woman's book, this is a man's book,' but to me *Child* has always seemed like a very male book. I see women responding more to a book like *Sleeping in Flame* than *A Child Across The Sky*, and again I don't mean that in a sexist way as in, 'This is softer, this is harder,' it's just that if you see your books as children, then one is a male child and one is a female child, and to hear a woman after reading one of my female 'children' say, 'I didn't like it' is more surprising to me than a woman disliking one of my male 'children.' Of course, I'm unhappy either way!"

So what sort of book is *Outside the Dog Museum*, Carroll's novel about a 'genius' architect recovering from a nervous breakdown, trying to find some value in life? "I think *Dog Museum* is two things. First of all, it's a funny book," he says, immediately qualifying the statement with a self-deprecatory, "I mean, I tried to make it funny." Then, "Secondly, it's a religious book."

It certainly is – the opening line is: "I'd just bitten the hand that fed me when God called, again."

"But it's not religious like, 'Let's get down on our knees,' but in the sense of looking for light and trying to stand in it, and I think whenever you have that kind of positive religious story you're dealing with a different set of cards to something like *A Child Across the Sky*, which was a very 'demonic' book – 'wages of sin' and all that stuff. *Dog Museum* is the upside-down of that."

I opine that Harry Radcliffe, the book's protagonist, is not as likeable as the lead players in Carroll's previous novels, and to my surprise Carroll describes Harry's personality as close to his own. "He's very much like me," he laughs, realizing perhaps that he is not paying himself a compliment. "[Like Harry] I don't have much of a public face – I avoid biographies on books and I avoid going to conventions for the most part. Harry's a little bit more hard-assed than I am, and more insufferable, but for the first time I feel ... not that it's autobiographical, but that I feel sympathetic in a one-on-one way with one of my characters."

Might Carroll at one stage have

chosen Harry's career of architecture and design over that of a writer? "I don't know, I've become interested in architecture over the last five years, I think because it's one of the things you notice as you begin to get older. Ten years ago, when I first started publishing books, I wasn't really interested in it. But with *Dog Museum*, because I was writing about a subject I was very much caught up in, it did at times feel indulgent." Not to me. "Well, you know, some people say that Harry drops too many names, but my argument to that is, well, Harry's a name-dropper!" At the end of the book, though, Harry gets his comeuppance. "Yeah, but in the kind of way where you're cheering for him. He's taken down a peg, but if I could be taken down that peg I'd be a happy fellow!"

So why does Carroll describe Harry as "an asshole"? "Well, maybe that's a little unfair. I think above all, Harry's a funny man. You know, when he says to the Sultan's son, 'You think I'm a pomme frite,' that's a really funny line. I mean, when I get into writing, the characters say the lines more than me. I once said that my character Venasque [who appears in *Sleeping in Flame*, *Child* and *Dog Museum*] says things long before I would ever think to say them. Often I'll write down things that Venasque says and then think, 'holy Christ, where did that come from?' You get so into the writing that, as in acting, you become the character, the character says things, and when you pull yourself away and become yourself again ... I often have the experience of coming away and saying, 'Jesus, that's an interesting line'; and I say it objectively because it is an interesting line, not because it came from my imagination."

Carroll asks what I have heard said about *Outside the Dog Museum* in England (it is to be published in the U.S. in February 1992), and I reluctantly admit that all I had heard before reading it was that it was 'a beautiful book with no plot.' And "it's Jonathan Carroll, so you know what to expect." He is intrigued and, I feel, a little upset by this admission. "Well for one thing, to me, *Dog Museum* is one of the most densely plotted books I ever wrote! If you said to me that *Child* has no plot, I'd say, 'Well, maybe,' but *Dog Museum* follows a very definite course. Also, I get very wary of people saying, 'Oh, it's a Jonathan Carroll book,' which usually to them denotes bull terrier dogs, Vienna and Venasque and all that stuff. If you go outside literature, you don't get people saying, 'Oh, it's another Sting album,' yet Sting always makes the same kind of albums ..."

But as a fan of Sting's, I argue, surely I would want to know that his new album was "him"? "Sure. I'm a Sting fan too, but if I said to you, 'Oh, his

I finished homework at about eight, and ran out to play football on the balding patch of grass in front of our houses. Anne came too, and the rest of our gang were there, apart from Harry Blaines, whose parents were having marital difficulties and were always taking him off with them to see some counselor as though the whole thing was his fault.

There was a problem; the last time we'd played, Charlie Miller had lobbed our plastic ball over the high fence into the Halls' back garden. The Halls were a mad and angry couple, and spent most of the time at home rowing and flying around the place as birds, pecking at each other, and at anyone who dared to ring the doorbell.

We all stood around arguing in the twilight. But then I remembered something – there was an old leather football in our garage. Cracked and deflated, it had been there for as long as I could remember, tucked out of sight and reach behind the old paint tins. On the off-chance that it might be of use, I went in, found the steps and pulled it down in a shower of rust and cobwebs. The odd thing was this; when I managed to fit in the nozzle of my bicycle pump, it began to wheeze and expand even before I started to inflate it.

I played in the side attacking the goal towards the brick wall by the row of garages. We all sprouted tentacles on our heads to distinguish us from the other side. As usual, I was centre forward. So were the rest of the team – Charlie, Bob, Peter, the two Ford sisters – apart from Anne, who was the smallest and ended up in goal between the piles of trainer tops and pull-overs. For some reason, she decided she could do the job better as a baby stegosaurus. I had to go over and have a quiet word with her after we had let in five quick and quite unnecessary goals.

"Saw your Mama in that shop today," John Williams came over and said to me as stood rubbing a bruised feeler and catching my breath. "The shirt department. That's where she works, isn't it?"

"What if she does?" I said.

"You should have seen her. There was this man wanted his shirt taken out of the wrapper. You know, all the bits of card and the pins. Jesus H. Christ, your poor Mum was all over the bloody counter. Hasn't got two proper hands these days has she?"

"At least she is my Mum," I said, which – as John Williams had a family who were all step-this-or-that – was a good below-the-belt swipe. I followed it up with a good below-the-belt kick.

When we'd finally finished fighting, we both felt better, and pleased with ourselves for being tough. I'd turned into a grizzly bear by then, and John was a tiger. But as always when you were fighting, you could never really manage the shape well enough to do any damage. That was probably a good thing, as I didn't really hate him anyway. He was just a loud-mouthed prat.

We got back to the game. The final score was Side The Tentacles, 14: Side Without, 17. In my view, at least five of the latter goals would have been disallowed if there had been a referee. An argument started over whether we should settle the thing on penalties.

That was when Mum came out. She was in her old blue dressing gown and I could tell that something was the matter from the way she didn't try to hide



her hand. Without saying a word to anyone, she walked out beneath the widening pools of streetlight and bent down to pick up the football. She said something to it, and held it close to her. Everyone just stood staring as she walked back inside.

Anne and I followed her back into the house a few minutes after. It was getting dark by then, and penalties were out of the question anyway.

Next day at school was pretty ordinary. Steven Halier got into trouble in Maths for changing into a porcupine, and was hauled out to the front. We all laughed when Mister Craig pulled off Steven's shoe before he'd had time to properly change back into it and plonked it there on the desk, bits of shoe-leather, flesh and spines all mangled up together. As punishment, he made Steven leave class without the opportunity to get the thing back on, and he had to hobble around the playground all through the lunch break with only half a foot.

I always kept well away from Anne at school. She was four years below me, and beneath my height of third-form dignity. The girls in her year were all crazy about horses, and took turns to change into one so that the others could take rides. The whole thing looked incredibly stupid from where I was standing by the goalposts on the playing fields, talking about the mysteries of the universe and whether Jane Jolly in the year above us had really got glandular fever or had actually been missing all term so she could have an abortion. Still, I recognized my little sis as she lumbered past me along the touchline, hoofed and on all fours. It was generally easy enough to tell someone you knew well no matter what shape they were in. She was stumbling with a cheap-looking plastic bridle, having trouble with the weight of the fat girl classmate on her back.

After lunch, just as history was starting, Anne and I were both called to the headmaster's office. The headmaster was sitting behind his desk in the form of a big teddy bear. We both let out a sigh of relief to see him that way – Mister Anderson often assumed that shape, but only when he was in a good mood and wasn't after your blood. It wasn't a terribly attractive teddy bear – the eyes really did look like glass buttons – but he entertained the idea that it made him appear friendly and approachable.

"I've had a phone call from your father at work," he said. "He's had to go off to the hospital now. It's your mother, I'm afraid. She's been taken ill. Your grandmother's coming round here to the school to pick you up."

Gran arrived a few minutes later in her little Austin and drove us back to the bungalow that she and Grandad had moved into after he retired from the fire service. Grandad didn't come, of course; Grandad didn't go anywhere now, except for walks. It had been a big family story about what had happened to him when he retired, one of those things which had gone past the stage of being sad – or even a joke – and was now simply accepted. After the first few job-free weeks of gardening and sitting around in the pub drinking more than he could afford, Grandad had started to get depressed. He said it was dog's life, doing nothing every day. Why, he'd had

ten men under him when he was working, with people's lives at stake. The Christmas when I was about six, Grandad had changed into a black and white mongrel with a jaunty eye patch, and he had never changed back since.

Gran now accepted Grandad that way, taking him for walks, buying tins of good-quality dog food at the supermarket, sending him to kennels and going off on holidays on her own. And so did we, the whole family. Not that Grandad was a particularly fun sort of dog to have around, the kind that you could throw sticks for and get into scrapes with. He was past sixty after all, crotchety half the time with rheumatism, his muzzle going grey. Still, he came up to me and Anne in the hall of their bungalow with his tail wagging. I patted his head and let him lick my hand for a while before Gran took us into the lounge.

Gran made us both sit down. She still hadn't said anything about Mum. Grandad scratched his ear and curled up in front of the gas fire, which, as always – and even now in the middle of summer – was on, and muttering to itself.

"My dears, you both look worried," she said – which I suppose we probably did. It hadn't really occurred to us that Mama might be seriously ill, but once before when Mum had gone into hospital to have something done, we'd had to spend a whole week with them in the bungalow whilst Dad went to work and tried to cook himself spam fritters at home for tea. Grandad and Grandma were fine in small doses, but not to stay with.

"Your Mum's really not that bad," Grandma added. "But you know she's been having trouble with that hand of hers. Now," Gran leaned forward, as though she was sharing a secret, "it's started to spread. And she can't do a thing about it."

We went to see Mum in hospital that evening. The three-toed sloth business with her hand hadn't so much spread as taken over. She wasn't in any of the usual wards, but in a new place at the back of the maternity wing that had bare concrete floors and smelled like a zoo. Mama was behind bars, hanging upside down from an old branch, with big brown eyes staring out. The doctor warned us not to try to put our hands through the bars, because Mum had really lost all control, and although sloths were herbivores, they could give you a nasty bite. Anne began to cry. She thought a herbivore was like cancer. I was older, and I guessed the truth – that Mama becoming a sloth wasn't that different to what had happened to Grandad, and that even though she hadn't done it deliberately, it was probably a kind of mental thing.

Mama just hung there, looking at us, her flattened muzzle gently twitching. She had a long shaggy coat that hung down around her, and the doctor explained that in the wild – and if Mum really had been a three-toed sloth – it would have been green with a special kind of algae. It was pretty boring really, and the chocolates and the stack of old women's magazines Gran had made us bring were obviously a waste of time. So as Gran wittered on uselessly through the bars about the WI fete, Anne and I opened up the chocolates and started munching them and squabbling over the centres, wandering along the cages to

see who else was here.

They were an odd-looking bunch. You can usually spot a shape-changed human from the real thing a mile off, but most of these were different. If it hadn't been for the medical charts with the names and graphs hanging by the padlocked doors, you'd never have guessed that most of them weren't what they pretended to be. Even Grandad, who'd been a mongrel for nearly five years now, wasn't anything like this convincing.

There was a llama, a coyote, a huge insect with mandibles like a lawnmower, and a creature-from-the-black-lagoon thing that seemed to be rotting at the fins and smelled like an old canal. There were bubbling tanks filled with fishes. One of them was recognizably a catfish, but was scooting around the bottom of the tank on wheels. At the far end, there was a plastic chair behind a rope that we thought was just a chair until it moved when Anne climbed over and tried to sit on it.

"What's that supposed to be?" Anne asked, pointing to a patch of turf in a glass case. I looked at the medical charts clipped to the side. It said: *Lumbricus terrestris*. I'd just done that in science and was able to tell Anne that it meant an earthworm.

Dad arrived soon afterwards. He'd picked up a big bouquet of roses from the caravan that sold flowers in the hospital carpark, and pushed them towards Mum through a flap in the bars. Mum reached out a long, lugubrious hand and took them. One by one, she ate the lot, thorns and all. Between wincing, Anne and I could hardly stop ourselves from laughing.

We didn't have to stay with Gran and Grandad that night. Dad had taken time off from work. That was a relief – we didn't even mind the soggy spam fritters too much, although at the same time it was a little worrying. I mean, I thought as the three of us sat in the lounge watching TV afterwards, this in-the-head business must be a lot worse than the secret-down-below business that had got Mum into hospital before. By chance, the people in the soap opera we were watching were sitting around in someone's kitchen talking about another of the characters who had supposedly become ill a couple of episodes before but was probably leaving the series. They were all in the shape of armadillos – which Dad said was the only way these people could act – and there were subtitles in case you had any difficulty understanding what they were saying. It seemed that the ill character had had a nervous breakdown, and that, like Mama, he was in a special wing of the local hospital. A nervous breakdown, was, I decided, exactly what Mama was having.

Dad was grumpy. He shoed us off to bed as if we didn't have any right to our usual books and baths. He didn't even ask if we'd done our homework, which any other time would have been reassuring.

Anne and I both climbed out of bed and squatted out of sight in the shadows at the top of the stairs as Dad rang up various relatives to explain what had happened. Mostly, it was an extended version of the stuff he'd told us, with the business about the hand and how Mum had been tired lately. But the last phone call he made to Mum's sister Joan was slightly different.

"Yeah," he said, sitting back on the creaky chair by the phone. "I guess it's all made it come back to her."

Dad nodded vigorously as Aunt Joan said something to him.

"Funny thing is," he said. "I thought she'd got over this thing years ago. I mean, you were there then, and I wasn't."

Eventually, he put down the phone and went back into the lounge, closing the door, turning up the TV loud as though he was trying to hide his thoughts. What thing, I wondered, lying awake in bed long after the house had gone silent. I was in one of those sweaty, tossy states when you're not sure whether you're awake or dreaming. I woke up fully with the figures of my alarm clock showing past two, and found that I had three long black claws on each hand, and that I was covered with hair. Although I changed back with no difficulty, the incident scared me. I knew now that what Mama had was a head-thing, but did that mean it couldn't be hereditary?

Next morning, Anne and I went to school as though it was any other day. The only difference was that Dad dropped us off in the car on his way to visit Mum at the hospital. Word had got around. All the teachers were nice to us that day, and even the other kids. Everyone seemed to know about Mum. I glared at John Williams when he came up to me during break, silently daring him to say the kind of thing that had got us into the fight when we were playing football. But one look at his face told me that it had gone beyond all that – that he actually felt sorry for me. More than anything, I think it was that that made me realize that Mum really was ill.

Gran and Grandad were there with Dad when we went to see Mum at hospital that evening. And Grandad was human. Anne didn't even recognize him. He looked pretty neat, the way you want your Grandad to look when you're a kid, not old and stooped and smelly, but with silver hair brushed back and long, in a white colonial suit with a dark blue waistcoat and paisley cravat bulging out at the collar. The only thing he hadn't changed was the jaunty black patch over one eye. It was probably a kind of birthmark.

Dad was very edgy. He'd come as a snake and kept climbing up over the bars as though he wanted to get into the cage with Mum, although at the same time he obviously didn't want to.

There was a doctor there too. A different doctor from the one we'd seen the night before. He was in a suit, and from the way he talked, I guessed he was a head-doctor, the type that you see in films. I thought, Oh no, we're going to end up like Harry Blaines, going to family therapy, but he turned out to be young and quite nice, and kept saying that he really thought Mum was doing well. She was eating plenty of leaves and fruit, and hanging there by her long arms the way sloths were apparently supposed to.

Back at home, Dad made us stay at the table in the kitchen after we'd eaten, which was the last thing we really wanted, what with the taste of his cooking and the room still filled with smoke from the blackened frying pan. But he said it was time we had a talk, and we knew from the look on his face (he'd turned back from a snake to drive the car home) that he really meant it.

"Your Mum," he said, "she didn't have a happy

new album isn't as good as his last one, but it's him, you'd say 'I gotta get that album, I gotta hear it for myself because I love his music.' Okay? Now, if you apply that here, if your friend says 'Oh, it's another Jonathan Carroll novel,' no matter what kind of twinkle he has in his eye, it can really be interpreted as a slight. You know, I've read reviews where they say, 'If you like Jonathan Carroll, you'll probably like this.' Now what does that mean? It's like they're saying, 'If you can take the talking dogs etc., then you'll most probably be able to swallow this.' It's kind of a put down. And I say this calmly because I've seen it more than once. I'll give you a couple of examples – Carroll's heroes are often very sensitive, and things happen to them that they didn't do themselves and they end up being victims; Carroll's women are very strong, often they take control and once in a while they're bad girls. Yeah, okay. But Sting has a lot of saxophone in his stuff..."

But surely, I counter, afraid that my losing the argument will hurt Carroll's feelings (see "Carroll's heroes," above), familiarity with something you love makes spending time with that something (whether that something is a novel, an album or even a wife) all the more enjoyable. "That's the upside of it," Carroll acknowledges. "The downside is, it isn't something new."

Carroll clearly takes criticism seriously and to heart. His reaction to the overwhelmingly positive newspaper reviews of *Outside the Dog Museum* is muted, yet he picks out novelist Mark Morris's review of the book in *Interzone's* sister publication *Million* as particularly important because, he says, "Although Mark said some beautiful things about the book, what touched me more is that although he likes my stuff, he wants me to do better next time."

I ask him what "next time" will be, and Carroll tells me that he has just finished a new novel called *After Silence* (which is not about the film industry in the wake of Hannibal Lecter's influence) which, in Britain at least, will once again feature a cover by acclaimed comic artist Dave McKean. McKean, of whom Carroll is a great admirer, was encouraged to work with Carroll by Century Hutchinson's Deborah Beale ("I think everyone has a crush on her," says Carroll). Since 1990's *Black Cocktail* novella, illustrated and covered by Arkham Asylum artist McKean, author and artist have collaborated, both on the new books and re-jacketing of Carroll's back catalogue, now five novels deep. McKean and Carroll, however, despite having also recently worked on an original graphic novel, *Uh-oh City*, together, have never met.

I am surprised to learn that Carroll

has only been to England twice, although he will be paying a third visit in September, when the World Fantasy Convention returns to London. How, I ask, does such a private man feel about coming to meet the fans? "Weird," he says, distinctly uneasily. "I mean, I've got some good chums over there and I'll be glad to see them, and Macdonald have spent so much money and effort promoting *Dog Museum* and the next book that I gotta give some of that back, so if they say, 'Come over to a convention,' I gotta do it. So I'll go to the London one, and I'm going to one in Texas next year. And that for me is like a really astounding, astonishing thing to do because although conventions are nice, they're also too nice, in a way. They make you a little bit too pleased with yourself, with everybody telling you what a good job you're doing. Not that we should whip ourselves and say we've been doing a bad job, but I think that can stroke you a little too much and take you off the path."

Does he find that, like many writers, he is asked at conventions to write certain things? "Yeah, an editor offered me a large sum of money last year to write a straight-on, 500-page horror novel. The money was beautiful, but I'm not a fast writer, and with my books coming in at about two-fifty, maybe 300 pages, basically to write a 500 page novel out of the kind of subject that I usually write, even for this large sum of money, you know...I could do it, but I wouldn't feel happy about it. If a guy writes about coconuts and somebody offers him a lot of money to write about bananas, he'll probably do a decent job, but he won't write as good a book as the guy who writes banana books."

Yet for all of Carroll's reluctance to appear in the public eye (he even refused, until *A Child Across the Sky*, to have a jacket photograph taken for his books, in case people "pigeon-holed" his books from his appearance), he once confessed a passion for signing sessions. "Writers who say they don't like to sign books are as full of bull as writers who say they don't like to write. What other rewards do you get? Okay, you get the money and the fan mail... But the signings – that's the best. This is a real silent profession, and for someone to say, 'I love this book and I want you to put your name on it because it means something to me.' Christ! You can't ask for a greater compliment."

It is time to draw our conversation to a close. I leave Carroll with a quote from Dr Hannibal Lecter: "I think it would be quite something to know you in private life." A meeting is scheduled for his next visit to London, and, as we break contact, a familiar feeling returns – that sensation of magic briefly known but lost, synonymous for me with finishing a Jonathan Carroll novel.

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Interaction

Continued from page 5

Dear Editors:

I think I have seldom encountered a story as repulsive as "The Bacchae" by Elizabeth Hand, in *IZ* 49. It was a vile parade of anti-male hatred, an exhibition of baroque man-killing justified, so it seems, by the crimes of discarded beer cans and a dying fish. But the malice is not only anti-male; the entire story brims over with an unfocused hatred of humanity that's not quite obscured by the tedious pseudo-decadent style, the luscious, lip-smacking obsession with empty detail.

"The Bacchae" is nothing more than a snuff movie in prose, heaped with feathers, jewels and furs. And what I can't get over is that, in an age of serial killers and Hungerford-type massacres, *Interzone's* editors decided to go ahead and publish this piece of poison. Several times in the past, the magazine has printed anti-male stories that have been justified by their supposedly being feminist stories. With "The Bacchae" no such justification can be used, and I hope that you'll never again subject the magazine's readers to similar chuckling depictions of agony (male or female).

Mike Cobley
Glasgow

Editor: This reminds us of a couple of misguided responses to Lee Montgomerie's "War and/or Peace," way back in *IZ* 11. Some people just have no appreciation of irony. For the record, we didn't publish Elizabeth Hand's "The Bacchae" as a "feminist" story.

Dear Editors:

Thanks for listing *The Unusual Genitals Party*, the Glasgow SF Circle's anthology, in the Books Received column of issue 50, and also for the comments. We don't expect to get rich off the thing, but hopefully it should break even, and possibly even make sufficient profit for a bit of a piss-up when it's sold out.

I also appreciated the *IZ* index – very useful – and enjoyed the Rachel Pollack interview. You should twist her arm a bit and try to get her to submit some more fiction. Any of her stories that I've read in *Interzone* have been excellent.

Jim Steel
Glasgow

The Family Football

Ian R. MacLeod

Dad came home as a centaur that day. He rapped his hooves impatiently on the front door for someone to let him in. My sister Anne and I were playing rats on the kitchen floor, running around the table legs and tickling Mum's legs with our whisks as she fixed tea.

"Go see to your Dad," Mum snapped at me, "and you should be past these silly games. You know how much I hate those long pink tails."

I wandered grumpily down the hall, climbing back into human form as I did so. Dad's horse-and-man shape loomed through the frosted glass. He humphed at me when I opened the door as though I'd been a long time coming, then pushed past and trotted into the lounge. He tried to sit down on the sofa, gave up, and clumsily bent his four legs to lower himself down on the carpet.

"You should be doing your homework," he said as I stood watching from the doorway.

"I'll do it all straight after tea."

"Well just don't expect..." he winced. The long joints of his equine legs were hurting in the position he was sitting. As he changed into the shape of a large labrador, I stood waiting for the end of a sentence I knew by heart. "...don't expect to play football afterwards."

I nodded. If I hadn't already known what he was saying, his dog's vocal chords would have given me few clues. Dad was a physically clumsy man. He often changed shapes on the way home on the train when he'd had a bad day at work to try to get it out of his system. But no matter what shape he took, he was never able to make himself either well understood or comfortable.

At tea, we all came as ourselves. Only babies did otherwise, squirming from half-formed shape to shape as I could still (and with some disgust) remember Anne doing in her high chair.

Mum said, "I went to see Doctor Shaw today."

"Oh," Dad said, not looking, chasing a few stray peas around the plate with his fork.

"He says they'll need to do more tests to see what the problem is."

"You can get the time off at the shop?"

"They have to give it, don't they? It's the law."

"I told you when you started there, it's a mistake to work anywhere where there's no union."

"Well, I'm going to go anyway, day after tomorrow. I'm sick of...sick of this thing."

Mum was gazing down at her plate. She'd only

given herself baked beans on a slice of toast instead of the gammon and egg the rest of us had. It had been the same now for two or three months, since her problem had started. She really couldn't face up to meat, and would have been happier – if she could have faced the indignity – climbing trees and nibbling at bits of green stuff out in the garden. Anne and I had caught her doing just that on a couple of occasions when we were home all day at half term. Hanging upside down from the almond tree with her apron flapping over her face. She'd shooed us all the way out of the house, her face flushing between anger and embarrassment.

"You've got rights," Dad said. "Just you tell me if they cause you any trouble."

Mum said nothing. She dropped her fork onto the tablecloth with her good left hand, leaving a streak of tomato. I knew even then that she was going through a bad time, what with her right hand. At the moment, she had it hidden beneath the table, not so much because she didn't want to see it – she'd given up after the first few weeks wearing gloves and bandages except when she went out of the house – but because she hated having to look at it herself. Her right hand was hairy, hairy with hairs that only petered out around her elbow. And it had the three long hooked claws of *brandypus griesus*, the three-toed sloth or ai. It had been a mystery to us all how she'd even come up with that shape in the first place, as Mum wasn't a great changer and was never very imaginative about it when she did. But it had happened in the night when she was asleep, which was always more difficult because you didn't have the normal control. She put it down to the cheese she'd had before she'd gone to bed, and some wildlife programme she'd been watching – which was odd, because all the rest of us could remember seeing that night was a quiz programme, some football and the news.

"Well anyway," she said. "Tomorrow's another day."

"That's right," said Dad. "And I'm due some overtime from all the supplementary bills we've had to send out. How about we get a baby sitter for these two here and go out for a few drinks."

Anne piped in, "Please, not Mrs Bossom again."

But Mum shook her head anyway. "I'm sorry dear. I've promised to take the kids over for tea to see Grandma. Of course, I'll leave something nice for you to microwave."

Dad nodded and chewed his food, glaring across at the microwave.

childhood. Well, she was a woman by then really, the time I'm talking about."

"But it was before she met you," I said, and Dad gave me a look as though he guessed that we'd been listening to him on the phone to Aunt Joan last evening. For some reason, the thought of being a sneak made me turn into an elephant. It was embarrassing – but for a while, I just couldn't help it.

Ignoring me – not even making his usual warning about the strength of the furniture – Dad went on: "Your Mum had a – a difficult time when she was in her late teens."

I nodded, my trunk swinging slightly and knocking over the bottle of brown sauce before I had a chance to pull it back in. If Mum was late teens at the time, I guessed that it probably had to do with sex and babies. From my experience, there was not much else that kids of that age got up to, apart from maybe doing drugs and stealing cars, and I couldn't see Mum ever being like that.

"She wasn't very happy," I suggested, "and now she's not feeling happy again."

Dad nodded, and then he shook his head. "That's exactly it..."

I thought he was going to say something more. From the way Dad had his mouth half-open, he obviously thought so too. But, looking at us, he changed his mind.

Afterwards, Anne and I decided we might as well go out and play. Dad was shut in the lounge watching TV, one of those wrestling matches where they put Godzilla against King Kong and you can tell it's just people really and nothing like as good as the special effects you get in films. I looked around for the football, but it had gone from the garage. Dad had obviously hidden it, but I had a pretty good idea where to look – he and Mum were never very imaginative about hiding things. The football was tucked away with the dust under Mum and Dad's bed.

It was a good game that evening. And close. For once, Anne played out of goal – and she wasn't bad either, scoring twice, and with only one own goal. We forgot about the time. Dad came out in his vest when it was almost dark and we were just having fun. He went mad when he saw the ball we were using. He put his hand up to hit me, and only just managed to stop himself.

Dad took the ball inside and dumped it in the sink in the kitchen, wrapped up in a towel as though he could hardly bear to touch it.

He found me staring at it when I came down after my bath to get a drink of orange.

"Son, I'm sorry about what happened on the green," he said, patting my shoulder with a shaky hand. "But under no circumstances are you ever to touch that football. Not you or even Annie. Not ever again."

I didn't say anything, and I didn't sleep much. In the morning, Dad took the football along with him when he dropped us off on the way to the hospital. He had it in on the front passenger seat, still wrapped up in the towel. To stop it rolling, he had put the seatbelt around it.

Grandad picked us up from school that evening. He

was still a human, but I wasn't too keen on the idea of him driving Gran's Austin: normally, he travelled around in it with his head out of the back window, barking at pedestrians.

"Is Mum any better?" I asked, sitting on the front passenger seat beside him, thinking how odd it was to be talking to this smart grey-haired gent.

"I think she is," he said, smiling.

Grandad was keeping his eye firmly on the road. The skin around the dark patch on his left eye was crinkled. I could tell he was working up to saying something more.

"What has your Dad told you?" he asked.

From the back, picking the white dog hairs off her school blazer, Anne chirped, "He told us that Mum wasn't very happy once."

"Not very happy." Grandad shifted into gear as the lights changed. The car gave a jerk and nearly stalled. Grandad was okay at driving, but not that good. "I suppose that's right. You're, ah, both very young for the thing I'm going to have to tell you now. But we've spoken to the doctors at the hospital, and we reckon it's the best way. If you want your Mum to get better... you do want that, don't you?"

We both said yes. We were driving along the high street past the shops now. A couple of salamanders were lounging in the sun outside the new DIY superstore. I recognized them as tough older kids from school.

"Your Mum had a baby when she was... when she was far too young. Before she even met your Dad. You understand what that means?"

We both nodded. I decided it wasn't worth the bother of letting Grandad know that I'd worked that much out already.

"So we thought we could have the baby adopted. You know, given to some people who couldn't have a baby, but wanted one. It was a kind of... family secret."

"That the baby was adopted?" I asked.

"No." Grandad grated the gears. "That it wasn't. Even your Dad didn't know that when he and your Mum were courting. We hid it. I guess now we're all to blame, I suppose... apart from you kids of course. Your Mum couldn't part with the baby, and I don't think anyone else would have had him anyway. The poor little thing wasn't – isn't – right in the head. He can't change shapes like the rest of us. For a while, we didn't think he could change at all. He was always just asleep, not really growing or living. Then one day, I put him down in the corner of my study, by this old football. When I looked..."

We'd reached the hospital. Grandad parked the car at the far end, but we didn't get out.

I asked, "Did Dad know about this?"

Slowly, still gripping the wheel tight, Grandad nodded. "Just before they got married, yes. But he always found it hard to take. He couldn't stand to have Tom around, reminding him. That was why he ended up in the garage. There for years. As a football."

"And he's called Tom," I said eventually.

Grandad nodded. He reached and took both of our hands to help us out of the car.

"Come on," he said, "let's see how your Mum is. She's got Tom with her now."

We went and saw Mum. She was still a sloth, but she'd changed her face enough to smile, and it was obvious that she was a little better. She had Tom, our old family football, cradled in her arms. Dad was Dad. I could tell he was fidgeting to change into a snake or something, but tonight he stayed himself.

We all stood around with the head-doctor, smiling and talking in big shaky voices. Eventually, Anne started to cry. I was glad when she blurted out the thing that had been worrying me too. I mean, we'd been kicking Tom around the night before. I could still hear that leathery slap he made when he hit the back wall of the garages. But the head-doctor was reassuring. Tom wasn't really like us. He was a football. He probably even liked being played. It was better, after all, than the years he'd spent hidden behind the paint tins in our garage.

Anne stopped crying, and I took hold of her hand. Now that everything was out in the open, I felt relieved. But Dad was just standing there, gazing down at the concrete. Apart from Mum herself, I suppose this whole thing was most difficult for him out of all of us. It took a week of visits to the hospital before he could bring himself to reach through the bars and take Tom from Mum's incredibly long arms. A few moments later, he had to give him back, but next day, he kept hold. Gran and Grandad were there too, and I suppose we were wondering what Dad was going to do next. But he surprised us all by lobbing Tom gently into the air, then kicking him on the volley towards me. He came over at head height, and I nodded him down towards Anne, and she caught him. It was perfect, one of those miraculous moments that hardly ever happen. And we all started to laugh and pat each other's back and in the excitement Grandad forgot he was human and started to bark.

That was the real beginning of Mum getting better. Next day, her head had changed back into the person we knew. And the day after that – after we'd borrowed Tom for a big game down at the park against the lot from the next estate – we came late with Gran back to the hospital to tell Mum about it, and found her sitting up on a log in her old house coat. She was complaining about the noise and the smell in her ward, but she was smiling.

They soon moved her to a proper ward. And not long after that, she came home for good. Even her right hand was back to normal. The head-doctor said it had all been a kind of hysterical paralysis. The hand had been a warning sign, but what probably tipped the balance was seeing me and Anne playing football with Tom out on the grass in front of our houses.

When Grandad and Grandad came around for tea on the Sunday after Mum got out, Grandad had gone back to being a dog again. We all felt a little sad to lose him that way – he had been such a nice old man. But at least he'd changed from a mongrel into a red setter, and although he was still old – and he still had the black patch – he was more fun to be with from then on. We used to go around to Gran's to bring him along with us when we took Tom to play in the park.

Tom stayed a football. I supposed he always will, never changing, never getting old. Sometimes I talk to him, but I don't think he hears, or understands if he does. One evening that summer when we were



playing with him on the green, the inevitable happened and he flew over the fence into the Halls' back garden. Knowing we couldn't just leave him there the way we had with all the other footballs, Anne and I went up and rang their front door. Mrs Hall answered. She was shaped as an octopus actually, not a bird at all. And she simply let us in to collect up all the balls and everything else that had landed in their garden over the years.

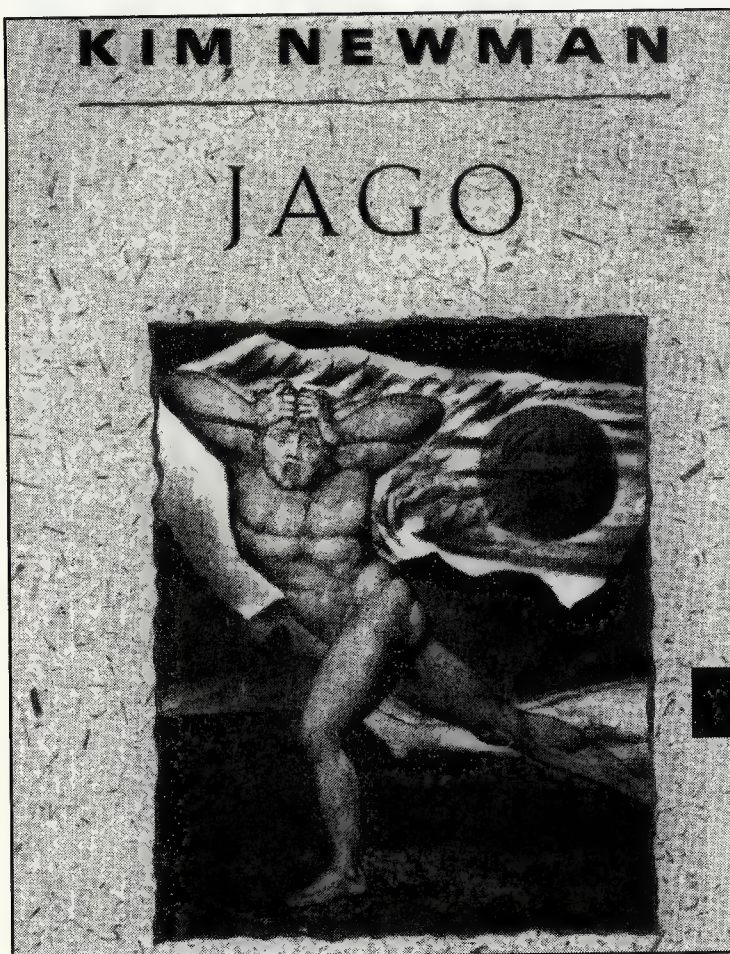
With all the other balls back, we still always played with Tom. Of course, the other kids knew about him, and were a little edgy at first, passing gently, using side-foots towards goal. But I realized that Tom was finally accepted when John Williams missed a penalty and ran over to the fence to yell down at him as though it was his fault. We all fell about laughing at that, and when I happened to look up at the top windows of our house, I saw that Mum was standing in the bedroom with the net curtains pulled back. She was smiling.

We were well into the summer holidays by then. Dad had had a couple of good pay cheques, and we agreed that all of us would go on holiday together, and abroad for a change. Dad, Mum, me, Anne, Gran, and Tom. Even Grandad agreed to change back into a human for the fortnight to save any problems with quarantine.

I can still remember packing my case for that holiday on the night before we took the plane. Filling it up with books and shorts and tee shirts and cream for mosquito bites and clean pairs of pants. I could already picture that white beach, the white hotels, the cool old-fashioned streets at the back, the warm sea beckoning in the sunshine. First day, we'd all run out straight after breakfast and kick Tom across the smooth hot sand towards the breakers, changing into porpoises as we did so. Diving down into the stream of the ocean, bobbing Tom on our noses, dancing in the dappled light.

Which, as things turned out, is exactly what we did.

Ian R. MacLeod last appeared in *Interzone* with "Past Magic" (issue 39). He is what they call an up-and-coming new British writer; evidence of this can be found in the latest crop of "best-of-the-year" anthologies. He has a different story in each one (i.e. those edited by Dozois, Datlow & Windling, and Jones & Campbell), not to mention a reprint of his "Well-Loved" in *Interzone: The 5th Anthology* (NEL, £5.99). He lives near Birmingham with his solicitor wife.



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Neil Armstrong Remembers His Journey to the Moon

J.G. Ballard

I remember the white nightclub where we were asked to wait, for reasons that I never understood, and the ceiling that seemed to be carved from ice, but this was long after we came back from the Moon. Everyone sat around the white tables, the frost shining on their tuxedos, and clearly expected me to make a speech. But no-one from NASA was there, and I felt that I had nothing to tell them that they would want to hear. Luckily, the band struck up, and an old man in top hat and tails began a mime act. He went through a series of make-believe conjuring tricks that had the audience smiling, but I knew that these were really in-flight emergency drills and that there was nothing very funny about them.

A girl in a sequinned wedding-dress came onto the stage and began to read out long strings of numbers like a bingo caller. She seemed bored with the numbers, impatient to get back to her wedding ceremony, but we wrote them down on our menus, hoping that one of us would win a prize. Then I realized that the numbers were radio frequencies, and that I could call Grissom, White and Chaffee and warn them to get out of the ship before the fire started. But there were too many

numbers, then as before. When I left the nightclub the girl was reading out the numbers in a sing-song voice and had started to do a strip-tease, taking off the sleeves and skirt of her wedding-dress.

Outside the nightclub the ground was covered with fine snow. A white mist hung over everything, but there were patches of clearer sunlight where people were standing. The ice stretched towards the east in endless sheets, and we could see the domes of Moscow on the horizon. I followed a set of deep ruts in the snow that reminded me of the ski-tracks that obsessed Gregory Peck in *Spellbound*. People stamped their feet in the icy mist, some dressed in laboratory coats and others in German Army field grey. I approached a group of generals who were standing behind Hitler as he explained to Eva Braun how hard the ice had been. He matter-of-factly described the transportation problems he had found in trying to cross this white wilderness. One of the generals announced that a unit of ski-troops would soon arrive to rescue us. For a while I listened to Hitler talking about his difficulties with the ice, but I knew the ski-troops would never arrive.

J.G. Ballard is perhaps the outstanding example of a major science-fiction author (godfather of the 1960s New Wave) who has also become accepted as a major British literary figure. Not only that, but he became something of an inspiration to the rebellious punk-rock generation of the 1970s, with several bands and individuals named after his stories, songs based on his books, etc. And, since 1987, he's a movie-world hot property too: novels of his have been filmed by Steven Spielberg and (forthcoming) David Cronenberg. Despite all this, Ballard is notorious for his very quiet and unassuming lifestyle.

He is a longtime contributor to this magazine, and four of the stories in his last collection, *War Fever* (1990), first appeared in these pages. We published an interview with him in *Interzone* 51, and since then his new novel, *The Kindness of Women* (Harper Collins, £14.99), has appeared and has gained much media attention. The above vignette was written and sent to us just before he began his huge round of television and newspaper interviews. He says he hopes to write us a new, longer, short story once the brouhaha has died down.

Why is Arnold Schwarzenegger at Me?

John Brosnan

I feel something of an interloper discussing sf movies within these pages as *Interzone* possesses one of the best film critics around, Nick Lowe, but the editor understandably asked me to provide some words to justify the cover of this issue featuring the jacket of my new book on sf movies, *The Primal Screen*. Of course, the reason why the jacket of my book is decorating the cover of *Interzone* is because the publishers paid for the privilege but I agree with the editor that an explanation of what the book is about, and why it may be of interest to IZ readers, is called for. I also look forward to the challenge of seeing how many more times I can mention the title of the book in the remainder of this article...

The Primal Screen (1) is a complete reworking, and updating, of my previous book on the cinema, *Future Tense*, which I wrote way back in 1977. The new book is rather more light-hearted on the subject; I'm afraid I regarded it all much more seriously in 1977 and took it quite personally when sf film makers insulted my intelligence (these days I have no confidence at all in my intelligence and thus it's rarely insulted).

The underlying theme of the new book is that I, in common with American film makers of my generation like George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, etc, was culturally imprinted with the sf movies of the 1950s. Films such as *It Came from Outer Space*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Thing*, *Them!*, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *The War of the Worlds*, *This Island Earth*, *Forbidden Planet* and *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*. And it wasn't just film makers of my generation who, like me, saw these movies as a child on the big screen, but later, younger generations who encountered them through television and were similarly influenced. It is not, I firmly believe, mere nostalgia on my part that imbues the sf films of the Fifties with a special quality and in *The Primal Screen* (2) I attempt to explain just what this special quality may be.

Another theme in the new book is carried over from *Future Tense*: the gulf between written sf and sf movies. I, unlike, I suspect, any of the film makers I mentioned above, went on to

become an avid sf reader and by the time I was a teenager I'd become dissatisfied as to why no one made "proper" sf movies from sf novels. I harped on this a great deal in *Future Tense*, along with the inevitable gripes about scientific errors in sf movies, and took issue with my friend John Baxter who had written, in his pioneering book on sf cinema, *Science Fiction in the Movies*, that "Even the greatest of cinema artists cannot do more than approximate in symbols the intellectual development of an abstract premise on which sf depends so much for its effects, while the lack of a set of symbols common to sf writer and film maker renders the work of one totally alien to the other. Science fiction film, then, is an intellectual impossibility." I still disagree with him, though not so passionately, but anyway in 1977 I ended *Future Tense* by expressing the hope that in the Eighties we would be seeing sf movies based on the works of some of the major writers. In other words, "proper" sf movies.

Of course, very few movies based on sf novels were actually made. There was *Dune*, once described as a long trailer for a movie that was never made, based on the Frank Herbert novel, and *Blade Runner* and *Total Recall*, both based, in varying degrees, on the works of Philip K. Dick (and there was also *Millennium*, scripted by John Varley and based on his own short story, "Air Raid," but directed by the dreaded Michael Anderson). Were any of them "proper" sf movies...? But here I must digress to comment upon the most bizarre development in sf cinema in the Eighties. I mean, I wasn't alone in not predicting 14 years ago that sf cinema would become synonymous, in the eyes of the general cinema-going, and video-watching, public, with an Austrian body-builder by the name of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Who could have predicted such a development? Why has it happened? What is this strange affinity between sf cinema and Schwarzenegger? What did we do to deserve it?

Well, the reason for this development is, of course, James Cameron, the man who had the canny idea of casting Arnie as a killer android

from the future in the 1984 movie, *The Terminator*. Since then Arnie has starred in a series of big budget sf movies: *Predator*, *The Running Man*, *Total Recall* and now *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, not only the most expensive sf movie ever made but, if the rumours are true, the most expensive movie ever made. What makes Arnie and sf so good in bed together? Because, as a larger-than-life figure, he fits suitably into a larger-than-life genre? Possibly. Certainly the character of the Terminator is machine-made for Arnie, and the new movie has embellished it somewhat, turning him from a cold hearted killing machine to a killing machine with a heart of gold. Arnie's Terminator will no doubt come to be regarded as affectionately as Karloff's Frankenstein monster once was.

But let's take a look at the Terminator's true creator, James Cameron. I suspect that unlike the bulk of sf film makers, who have never read much, if any at all, written sf but were influenced mainly by sf movies and comics, Jim devoured a lot of the hard stuff in his youth. George Lucas utilized a mixture of sf visuals created by sf jacket artists and illustrators for *Star Wars* but used a fairy story for his plot; in *The Terminator*, by contrast, Cameron used a number of sf literary influences as well as visual ones. For example, it was the first occasion that time travel was properly exploited in an sf movie. As I describe in *The Primal Screen* (3), back in the early Eighties I came up with the beginning of a screenplay that I called *Time Wars*.

Noting there was a rich vein of time-travel literature by such people as Poul Anderson, Robert Heinlein, Murray Leinster, Fritz Leiber (most significantly *The Big Time* in Leiber's case), etc., that had been unplundered by Hollywood I decided I would get in first with a story about this woman hitch-hiker who is picked up by a mysterious man in a strange car in the desert. It turns out the car is a time machine and the driver a time warrior from the future who has come to protect the woman from some bad guys from the future because at some point soon she will do something that will have a crucial effect on the distant future. One of the reasons I never got

past page 6 was that I couldn't come up with a suitably crucial thing for her to do. The idea of her having a crucial baby never occurred to me though it did to James Cameron – and much else besides when he wrote *The Terminator*. I think he did a real neat job of plotting, as well as probably borrowing from all those writers I mentioned that I'd intended borrowing from (and the sequences set in the future may have been inspired by some of Philip K. Dick's post-apocalyptic stories, most notably "Second Variety"). Incidentally, my *Time Wars* idea indirectly led to a multi-million dollar sf movie being made in Australia called *Time Guardian*. It was a disaster. The full account of this strange development can be read in *The Primal Screen* (4).

If *The Terminator* suggested that Cameron was a man who knew his written sf his second film, *Aliens*, proved it (among its many sf references are a number to Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*) and I enjoyed a lot of it. True, he came a cropper with his next movie, *The Abyss*. It has some great things in it but unfortunately it also has those lousy aliens. And due to some hasty, last-minute cutting by Cameron it's hard to fathom just what the aliens are doing in the story (to find out I was actually obliged to read something by Orson Scott Card – the novelization of the film). Anyway, Cameron is back on form with *Terminator 2*, though there is some justification to the claim by some critics that it is just a noisier, flashier, more expensive remake of the first one. What the hell, I enjoyed it.

And here we come to the core of my dilemma – while I admit that the modern sf film has come to be associated with mega-violence and Arnold Schwarzenegger I must confess to enjoying it. Yes, I enjoyed *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator*, *Robocop* (though not the second one), *Aliens*, *Predator*, *Total Recall* (apart from the stupid ending) and *Terminator 2*. And, good grief, I also think that, in the main, they're "proper" sf movies. I go along with Dan O'Bannon, who was involved in the early stages of *Total Recall*; he didn't think much of the finished movie (he didn't like the ending either) but as he said: "This movie is something rare. It is an actual science-fiction movie. Far and away the majority of sf films are really something else in disguise, but *Total Recall* is an actual sf movie because it depends utterly on the imaginative quality. You couldn't tell the story otherwise." Yes, indeed, despite the mis-casting of Schwarzenegger (Richard Dreyfuss was going to play the role at one stage) and director Paul Verhoeven's absurdly over-the-top violence, *Total Recall* is a real sf movie. And so is *Terminator 2*, though here Schwarzenegger is perfectly cast and the violence is under

control and even justifiable.

So whither the sf movie from here? Well, in *The Primal Screen* (5) I don't make the same mistake I made in *Future Tense* of trying to predict its future during the next ten years. If I'm still around at the end of that period it

will be the year 2001 and I, like a lot of other writers, will probably be churning out pieces about how Stanley Kubrick got it all wrong and reminiscing about the days when President Schwarzenegger used to star in sf movies.
(John Brosnan)



From 'Terminator 2' (Carolco)

Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

There's no future in the movies any more. Sad, but symptomatic: all the old futures are passé, and the only real-world ones you can more or less suspend disbelief in have a long way to go before they're developed for tourism. The last movie with a half-credible image of things to come was, what? *Blade Runner*?? since which the best you can hope for is either a jokey Verhoeven dystopia or a convenient Cameronian genre prefab. It's all stuff to suck, not swallow; you buy for the flavour rather than any hope of actual nourishment. Today's films are set in the future purely for narrative comfort, visual interest, and occasional low-

level satire – never for the sake of futurology as such, and never ever with the ambition of making us believe. For such a shameless medium, in fact, cinema has got remarkably embarrassed about saleable visions of tomorrow. With space opera dead, the nearer the future the better, and the less screen time actually spent there the better still. Not for the nineties your "All the universe, or nothing! which shall it be?" Neither of these intrinsically interesting options seems even to feature on the menu.

It's really quite odd, as the combination of millennial chic with obvious global developments both environ-

mental and political has got public imagination more involved with the idea of the future than ever before. It could, of course, simply be that the great tradition of speculative things-to-come cinema from *Metropolis* to the seventies post-apocs has died of dehydration, in a wasteland of parched imagination where there is neither time nor change but only eternal not-as-good sequels. But more probably it's the way the future, the real future, has changed. It used to be taken quite comfortably for granted in pop futurology that we would see armageddon in our lifetime, and out of the ruins would emerge a rugged world of glaring sunlight, papier-mache rock, and filters, filters...

There's always been something wonderfully clean about catastrophist models of futurity, which for all their dystopic bleakness at least promise a new world wiped clean of all complexity. Unfortunately for the movies, apocalypse is currently way off the agenda, at least for any but a few popeyed survivalists and unreprogrammed peace persons beyond the reach of rehabilitation. The best global catastrophe on the current schedule is frying Gaia's immune defences, whose consequences are apparently recognized as far too mucky and complicated to be boiled down into a Hollywood swashbuckler. Otherwise, the only materials to cut a future from are the deeply uncinematic realities of transnational economic superpolitics. (In this connection, probably the most realistic future seen on bigscreen all year was an astonishing piece of seventies-nostalgia no-sense called *Prayer of the Rollerboys*, in which Japan quite literally bought the American dream and [banner headline] "Germany Buys Poland." Ho-ho very satirical. I missed what the prayer was, perhaps from musing too hard on the happy image of what would really happen if you attempted a gunfight on rollerskates.) Clearly no future in that.

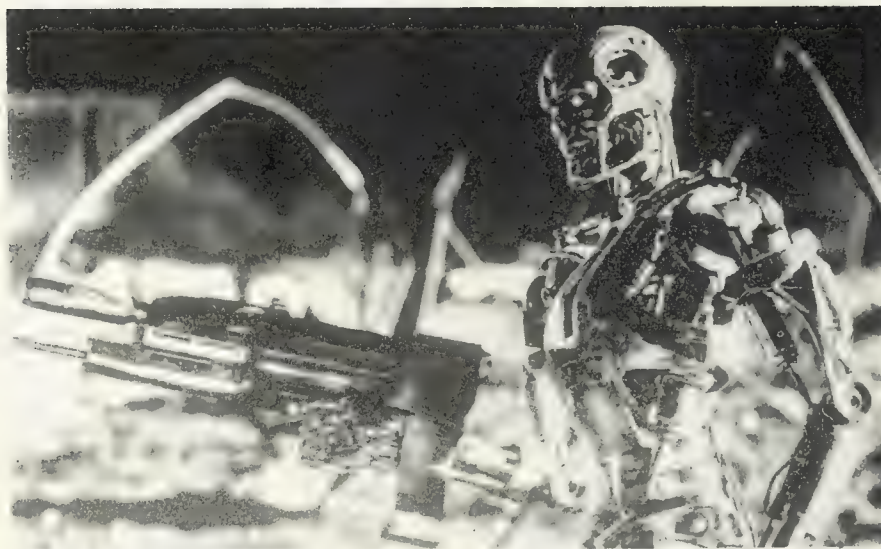
So Hollywood seems to be investing massive resources in a project of denying history. The past is, if anything, even more exposed and vulnerable than the future, presumably because it's so safely and inoffensively dead. Any historical myth that moves is likely to get snapped up, remodelled as a duff facsimile of Indiana Jones, and its original sociopolitical propellant replaced by some methanous twaddle about guys' problems with their fathers. (By God, when I'm censor these films will burn. Passing utterances of "I love you" will be either bleeped out or humanely overdubbed as "eat my shorts.") All references to fathers, especially by Kevin Costner, will be punished by compulsory infibulation of the head. We have a duty to protect the impressionable.) Whatever the reason, period fantasies seem to be booming just as futuristic fantasies hit the skids. Possibly people are just too sophisticated about the future to take it seriously.

And this is just one of three migraine-sized problems facing the doggedly well-meaning and able James Cameron in delivering a product called **Terminator 2**. Fundamentally, the war-against-the-Machines concept was already a stiff in 1984. T2 does the sensible thing and spends only the titles in that future, with needless quantities of epic metal effects but blessedly little attempt to hack it into sense. But dear Jim has resolved to do serious things with what once was just a dopey time-twister gimmick, and somewhere the nettle has to be seized. So we have a new (in a strictly limited sense) rationale (ditto and double) for the War: a defence system that becomes self-aware and takes out most of humanity by provoking nuclear retaliation (why, isn't that quaint!) from the Sovs (my dears! how terribly old-world-order...). We have a chop-'em-off in-character homily from Linda Hamilton's enjoyably crazed

global guerrilla: "Men like you created the hydrogen bomb... you think you're so fucking creative... you don't know what it is to create a life, feel it growing inside you..." ("Mo-om!" pleads the future hero of the revolution, just in time to avert a national shortage of sickbags.) And above all, we have possibly the daffest moral in contemporary film entertainment: "Because of a machine, a Terminator can learn the value of human life. Maybe we can too." Och, away.

For yes, hurdle two is Cameron auteur, who is still on a mission impossible from God to create improving adult drama out of the most infantile genre material. It's impossible to suppress an occasional intake of breath at the sheer perverse audacity of a Terminator movie that sets out systematically to preach family values and non-violence – requiring *inter plurima alia* lots of dead butch shooting of guys in the leg, and panning a police ambush with cheerable high explosive while consistently aiming to miss. It's also important to Cameron's strange sense of filmic integrity (though also, presumably, to Linda Hamilton's contract) that there should be regular displays of incongruous quality emoting from such of the cast as are up to it. In particular, bizarre levels of seriousness are expended on the everyday human anguish of being a single mom on the run with a special-needs kid when you happen to know the human race is about to get nuked to its constituent smithereens, and when the parental bonding happens to be complicated by the youngster's acceptance of an indestructible humanoid killing machine as best pal and surrogate dad. ("The Terminator would always be there for him. It was the only one to measure up." Et cetera, while the Kia-Ora dribbles from the audience's dangling jaws.) With horrid inevitability, you know early on that before many more trucks have been jackknifed through windows and burst into flames, she's going to tell that brat that she loves it. And sure enough. The fact that both are absolutely terrifically played just makes the sense of is-this-the-right-cinema sharper. When Arn finally follows the villain and the McGuffin to take the big dive into the molten ending, you can actually see her thinking as she gazes moodily after: There he goes. The only real man I've ever known... At least this time we're spared the voiceover.

And the third thing, of course, is that money can't buy back innocence. In 1984 Cameron was a nobody, Hamilton an unknown, and Schwarzenegger a joke – when suddenly out of nowhere spins this near-perfect entertainment that makes one a star, one a gigastar, and one the top sf action director of all time. Even on sixth or seventh viewing, when the original surprises have



From 'Terminator 2'

long since leached away, the old Terminator still looks wonderfully fresh. How could that freshness possibly be recreated, now the cash stakes, the maker's ambitions, and the big guy's range and powers of delivery have all hopelessly outstripped the original subject? Can it be made up just by determined concept hike, excess script quality, upgraded effects, broader ageband appeal, bigger and better set pieces, and budget, budget, budget? Is it possible after all, given sufficient will, talent, and cash, to breed a pig with wings?

Well, of course not, not really. But you can, in the end, buy value, and goodness knows T2 is stuffed to the sprocketholes with big film value. Arnold walking oo-er naked into saloon in search of clothes, scans bikers, rejecting first target: subject not wearing enough funky leather... Arnold, Hamilton, & kid bonding into ultimate Cameron nukular family, signalled by mom stripping to sleeveless t-shirt & cigaret in gob, donning heavy shades and pointing truck south... And in the meantime younger viewers, at least if overseas and adult-accompanied, can absorb useful instruction on how to groom for a challenging career as a famous rebel leader in the fight against the mechanoids: cut skool, hang out in arcades, do bikes (is this legal for US ten-year-olds??), hack into cash machines (useful prep for when you need to break into a top-security McGuffin safe which, by staggering serendipity, uses a standard 4-digit PIN no.), look after your mom, say no to drugs, and employ lots of rather poor 1987-vintage Latino argot. Other attractions among many include plenty of exploding big truck action; the first really convincing-looking nuke attack on LA (hurrah!); and an eminently hissable bad guy machine like an evil Danny Kaye who's made entirely out of your favourite effect from *The Abyss*, and who spars valiantly-but-doomed with the mighty A in successive contests of cool. (The T-1000's ultimate inferiority is early revealed in the rounds involving dress sense, choice of transportation, and above all small arms, where he has a weedy little handgun that goes phut phut phut while Arnold has this damage machine the size of a rhino's whanger that pumps out hi-ex dolby bassline.) If you can overlook the portentous aspirations, it's absolute top-of-the-market foolishness, end to end. Love it, or say your prayers.

Otherwise, a terrible summer. Long-way runnerup was the feeble **Rocketeer**, which managed to strip Dave Stevens' witty and good-looking comic of most of its wit and good looks, and turn its sassy, modern sexual politics into sassless U-cert Disneyana. The most interesting facet was the

curiously complex villainy structure, with its intriguing moral hierarchy of industry (building democracy through quality armaments), organized crime (sure, we deal in death and human misery, but we're A-1 patriots and above all great character actors), Feds (like the mob, only criminally lacking in a sense of humour), and sexually predatory poofy English Nazis (ooh, we hate those guys). Some interesting ambivalence, too, about the Sodom'n'Gomorrah world of old Hollywood, where virgins in low-cut white dresses get

sucked into the morass by the mere offence of aspiring to act – which inevitably leads to getting chloroformed by Errol Flynn, and spirited away to a prison of white satin sheets and the threat of a fate worse than a good time. Otherwise, Bill Campbell in the leading role is like Quayle in the Oval Office, and a frantic scattering of depressing movie-buff in-jokes leaves one thinking hard about debt relief. No more, I hope. If this is history, we should send in the terminators now.

(Nick Lowe)



From 'Mission Eureka' (Channel 4)

Tube Corn

TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

The first time I saw *Death in Venice* was in a lecture theatre along with two years-worth of other drama students. We were all crowded to the front with our earnest notebooks and careful searches for the significance of Visconti's use of the colour red, because we didn't have an actual print of the movie that could be shown on the screen but a video on a twenty five inch colour TV. Not only that but to add insult to injury it was a pirated video: you could tell because it cut out three minutes from the end and so Ron had to come down to the front and explain that "Tadzio stands in the sea like that" (imitation of a teapot, one arm crooked, one pointing) "and then Dirk Bogarde dies." I have always been fond of *Death in Venice*, although it is embarrassing that when most people in the cinema are snivelling at the end I often find myself giving way to inappropriate laughter.

So with **Mission Eureka** I find that my response to it is irrevocably coloured by the circumstances in which I first watched it: in a room at Channel 4 that was piled high with other video-

tapes in obsessively labelled Channel 4 boxes and where I was conscious always of their press and publicity department getting on with their work just beyond the glass walls of the room. Television matters to such people; it is not simply moving wallpaper for the hours spent lying on the sofa and sending out for pizza. I felt obliged to watch the entire final episode of this saga with a straight face. Indeed, I trust you will not think I am being immodest when I tell you that, when asked on my departure what I had thought of it, I heroically managed to articulate perfectly seriously the one word "interesting" before running out into Charlotte Street in shrieking hysterics.

For, yes, gentle reader, *Mission Eureka* was a bad programme. It was not even a compellingly awful, rip-roaring, golden-turkey-award-winning bad programme. It committed the ultimate crime of being bad but not being bad enough. Channel 4 knew that for themselves, or else why sneak it into the schedule at variable times after midnight?

What was wrong with it? Well first

it was a Euro production, and as we all know European television has come to mean "badly dubbed in miscellaneous accents" television. This, I am very much afraid, is why there will never be a successful European Space Agency, nor indeed a federated Europe and why ultimately American English will become the standard dialect of the known world. For how do we Europeans communicate with each other? Yes, we do it the way demonstrated in 'Allo 'Allo: the English speak English in clipped upper class eccents, OK cheps? Ze French, of corse, speak Engleesh laik zees and zuh Gurmans sprechen zo. And, no, no-one from the Atlantic to the Urals has lips synchronized with the sound coming out of them. This is clearly nonsense, and more so in a serial which dealt with a European agency and flitted fitfully from capital to capital throughout its episodes.

Surely the way forward for multi-lingual productions is to make them multi-lingual? Let the Germans speak German and the French speak French. If they would need a translator in life then let us see the translator, if they would in their daily work use a lingua franca let them use that lingua franca (even if it is, as I strongly suspect, mid-Atlantic English). And if the Italians are at home in their Italian houses speaking Italian to their Italian families then for goodness' sake let us hear them speak Italian. Sub-titles are not the worst thing that can happen in this life. For one thing they promote literacy in the audience and for another perhaps if we occasionally heard some authentic European voices even we xenophobic Brits might start to pick up some authentic European languages and drop our charming habit of believing anyone can understand English if we say it slowly and loudly enough with an O at the end of each word.

Secondly *Mission Eureka* had a preposterous plot.

Again this is not in itself a capital crime or else who would be saved? However it lacked relish. The Mad Scientist in the Wheelchair is working on his Killer Robot at the behest of the Evil Industrialist. Journalist-with-integrity (also Mad Scientist's Girlfriend) has realized that he is not really crippled: it is psychosomatic. So she persuades the Mad Scientist's Biker Assistant to give her the Secret Code to get into the lab where the Killer Robot is being tested. She hurls herself in front of the Killer Robot. Mad Scientist gets out of his wheelchair and runs across the lab to save her. The next thing you know the Killer Robot project has been abandoned in favour of the Molecular Computer and the Mad Scientist is back on the Nautilus strengthening "those beautiful muscles" and joking with the

Journalist about how you "can't strengthen that in a gym"!

But no! We also have a problem with the Molecular Computer because one of the technicians is a Secret Drinker: and "He's the only one who can handle the molecular layers - for that he needs a steady hand." (He puts them together by hand?)

Enough. You get the picture. In fact it was the penultimate episode where I realized what I was really watching, in the long piece of music that warned us Petrinelli was about to discover that his Mad Mother, whom he had of course kept incarcerated in the statutory attic for the last fifteen years, had overheard the Blackmailers threatening to expose her and so had neatly arrayed herself in black, laid herself out with folded arms and committed suicide so her son could confront the Blackmailer with a crisp "I have reported your blackmail to the police, resigned from my post, my mother is dead, get out." This was straightforward melodrama: simple caricatures instead of characters, preposterous plots, all underscored by throbbing music, but instead of playing it with moustache-twirling relish (like, for example, *Dallas* or *Dynasty*), the cast were being directed to play it for real. Now, it is just possible to do that, if you are a very, very good actor and you are very, very sincere about your reasons for wanting to misinterpret the mode of the piece; but in this, what was the point? Played to the hilt it could have been a classic. Played as soap it was a swiftly burst bubble.

Finally, what about those spacecraft? The one we saw in the background was NASA's shuttle, surely? So how was it that every time we went into the cheapo space-effects sequence they appeared to be piloting around in Thunderbird 5 with a coat of white emulsion? Something has happened to space: when was the last time you saw decent coverage of one of the paltry number of launches that actually take place? When someone died, of course. No-one expects the television audience to be interested in the nuts and bolts of space technology any more; there has to be some spurious "angle" - the "girl from Mars," for pete's sake - first. Surely I can't be the only person who still cares who boldly goes?

Yet *Mission Eureka* reduced even the classic dilemma of the space saga - can we save them or do we lie to them? - to muted melodrama. Marco-polo sat around in orbit with its double load of personnel after the rescue, all questions of fuel conservancy or oxygen capacity suspended, while Thomas had his little moral dilemma about whether or not his conscience would cope with risking their lives in an attempt to mend the expensive

Palladio's solar panel. Luckily there was of course a Mad Scientist on hand to rush in with a plan that "just might work," but it was Thomas' moral dilemma that we were supposed to interest ourselves in, not the mating spacecraft and the faulty panel. Space is interesting, dammit, and I would have liked *Mission Eureka* a whole lot more if it had had the nerve to think so too.

(Wendy Bradley)

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The Boulevard of Broken Domes

Gregory Feeley

Dawn comes late to these terraces, catching the arches and promenades below us minutes before the shadows on our walkways withdraw into the pillars that cast them. Some balcony or deck to the east is always obstructing the first direct rays, and I sit before my open windows and put on the tea, looking across as the sun illuminates the mulioned casements on the building directly opposite. With night the upper air cools, and the warmed waters at the bottom of the canal rise and exhale into mist, which lingers picturesquely in the new light but is quickly dispelled by sun and morning breezes.

For those who live on the canal or the boulevards, the low land affords an unobstructed view of sunrise over the curvature of our world, the white point of Cyrus bled to a wavering red as it penetrates the Canopy obliquely and then cuts through kilometres of air. Years ago I once spent the night on a houseboat, whose owner poled me before dawn to the canal's centre so I could see the sun rising directly over the water, spilling in shimmering flakes over the horizon as its first rays shone through the arches of three low bridges.

Days on the Equator last twenty-three hours, which is just about perfect for unadapted souls like me. I once spent a fortnight visiting an old classmate in northern Meridian, whose sun whips past in less than twenty hours, and don't see how they ever get used to it. Youngsters in the hundreds have recalibrated their brain hormones, but poor Madelaine would have none of that. And so she would find herself waking up an hour later every morning, despite her best efforts, and still have to take a nap out of that frightening brief afternoon. In the end, of course, she just lives fewer days than the gay blades around her, and goes about her life with the haunted sense that she is somehow accomplishing less, although of course she knows better. And Greenwich, with its languorous twenty-five-and-a-half hour cycle, has always seemed like some penitential afterlife, where ennui hangs upon the inmates like chains, and one longs for day's end as the sun creeps sluggishly across the sky.

And of course there are those who live at the crossroads, and scarcely see night at all. For every few hours of starlight and romance, you must put up with an equivalent period with two suns in the sky, when everyone has to draw the canopies and take in their plants.

I have always thought the Equator has the most desirable orbit for its sun because we lie upon Well-spring's plane of rotation, so most of the machinery

for its care and feeding coats our underside. Of course the other two rings share the poles, which hold great importance for research; but scientists have studied degeneracies for centuries, and only Wellspring supports life. Our little suns may heat the air and feed the winds that race them round their paths, but that heat would count for little if Wellspring were not spinning beneath us like a glowing coal, warming the floor of our triaxial world like a scone in your stomach on a cold wet evening.

A shout sails up from the slope below, and I look out to see Peter Ghofrany waving from the landing two levels below mine. He has about thirty-five steps to go, most of them lined with potted geraniums that have never been coaxed into blooming all at once. Peter sees me and starts up the steps, toiling past domiciles visible to me only as roofs that serve as gardens and decks for the next level. By the time he gets here I have flown back from the commode and found my water boiling, providentially enough for two.

"What an hour for you," I say as he clumps onto my landing. "Clearly you have been up all night. What is it this time?"

"A small chance of the end of the world," he says, puffing.

"I prefer your coverage of political scandals; it's something you know about." Many of the houses along the canal sport doors, a quaint safeguard against foul weather or, I suppose, brigands. I keep none but have my threshold on the bias, to baffle the east winds. It makes the doorframe seem narrower viewed head on, not that Peter shouldn't know better, and he walks straight in and bumps his shoulder.

"I wish you wouldn't keep such funhouse architecture," he complains. "It's no reward for people who come to do you a service."

"You just want to get your fat bulk up here where gravity's weaker," I say affectionately.

"Heavens, woman, a 3% abatement means nothing to me." Peter makes a show of being testy as he allows me to curl my hand round the back of his neck and nuzzle his shoulder. He has the most wonderful smell: his person always carries a fragrance of patchouli softened by what seems like cinnamon except that it also suggests the fur of some friendly animal. The cologne is his own product and a great secret: in a world where everyone has access to the same recycled materials real variety is zealously guarded.

Peter clears a mess of knitting off the other chair

as I pour the tea. "Have you read the latest *Pulsar*?" he asks, trying to keep self-importance out of his voice.

"Peter, I just got up." I forbear to point out that Peter's antiquated circulation system ensures that I will not have my news over breakfast unless I keep truly indulgent hours. Professing mistrust of the datanets, he prints his gazette on actual paper, which you can take into the commode or spill your tea upon. These screeds are delivered by hand, usually by dogsbodies recruited from the Equator's small adolescent population, who evidently look up at his raffish character and unquestioned iconoclasm. These kids – unsurprisingly, virtually all are boys – come bounding up the walkways to present copies to subscribers, who must return the crumbling sheafs for recycling each week. Peter is proud of explaining how this system flourished on Earth for over two hundred years, and now is virtually extinct save here.

Peter sees there is no paper on the table and affects indignation. "Where is he? Should have been up half an hour ago."

"Raffi's got double territory since your other carrier quit," I explain. I actually have little to do with the boy, who shoves my copy under the nonexistent door and races onward in mortal embarrassment. At this hour the carriers have the winding stairs mainly to themselves, a routine to which I had not yet adjusted when the poor gaping boy caught sight of me between sunroom and bed in my threadbare nightgown.

"Been keeping up with the scientific journals, dear?" Peter asks after taking a long sip. He knows I am scrupulous about my work, so I give him a look that suggests he continue. "The latest number of *Heavy Metal* has a discussion of instability dynamics that is causing a sensation."

"That number just came up yesterday," I protest. "I'm still reading it. – Instability in what?"

Peter smiles. "Why, in Wellspring herself. They are talking of convulsions that would knock our world loose like flies off a shaking rhino."

I stare over my half-raised cup. Instability questions invariably concern Gyro itself, not Wellspring. Neutron stars are among the more stable structures in the galaxy, and Wellspring is several million times smaller than any occurring naturally.

Peter's grasp of science is notoriously insecure, so I fix him with a hard look. "Peter, are we talking about X-rays bursts or speculations about spewed matter? Because the safety margin of the rings' shielding has a couple of zeroes in it."

He looks upon me indulgently. "No, my dear, I'm talking about something called a 'starquake.'"

"That's ridiculous," I say briskly. "Wellspring isn't a star, and doesn't share the properties of degeneracies bigger than the Sun." Nevertheless I was thinking. Peter is a shameless sensationalist, but after discounting for exaggeration the story was still worth following up.

He yawns, and remarks that his long day is over. I suspect he is hoping to retire to my bed, but am not about to disrupt my day to accommodate Peter's eccentric schedule. I shoo him out and put *Heavy Metal* on the wall, where it occupies my attention over the remainder of breakfast while sunrise languishes outside.



Illustrations by SMS

I don't understand half of it, since my training never included quantum degeneracies, but some of it sounds disturbing. I put the story on recite and listen to it again while I dress, then grab my scroll and head out.

Ninety-three steps and six tiers of houses separate my porch from the high road, and on some days I imagine I can feel a tiny increase in gravity with each one. Of course it is only at canal level that it reaches 1.00, so I am still ahead of the game, but there is no question my muscles are getting older. Last year I had the full treatment – collagen cross-links dissolved, necrotic matter removed from the cytoplasm of each cell molecule by molecule – and my legs still tire faster than they once did. I think the body knows the brain's age; it strains subtly beneath the weight of the years we remember.

Sailboats and punts are on the water below me, and my anxiety surfaces in my brief irritation at the sight of them. The material used for those hulls and sails come right out of the food chain, which runs less efficiently when there is not plenty of loose organics free. At least my flowers feed the carbon cycle.

Nevertheless I am cheered when a vagrant breeze brings a faint shout and the smell of green life on the water. Hurrah for the Equatorial Canal! Having a body of water in the ecosphere was necessary to stabilize the climate, but running a shallow canal round the middle of the ring was inspired. At some point everyone has taken the packet round the world, passing every building we have and waving at the crossroads at the two worlds perpendicular to our own, other suns, other canals, same water.

Halfway down I sit at a bench and call Yasmine. Her phone tells me that she will be teaching for another hour. Scientists at Chandrasekhar can't customize their hours to the height of the sun, so Yasmine lived on official time, which was (I checked) early afternoon. Gyro's rings are only twenty-four kilometres around, rather small to divide into time zones. The Administrative Centre and the quarters immediately around it enjoy a reasonable accord between clock time and solar time, but I wouldn't live near Administration if it killed me.

By the time I reach the high road people are moving about, and I wave hello, too busy to stop. I turn onto Chen Street North, which takes me across the low road, the boulevard, and onto the Chen Bridge. The boat slip is just off the towpath, but I pause a moment and look up Chen Street South, which would take me up to the pretty-windowed building I see each morning. From this angle the facade looks oddly foreshortened, which always suffices to deter me from examining the building close up.

It is fifteen minutes until the next boat, and I sit down amid squawking gulls and open my scroll. I ask about spontaneous disruptions to neutron stars, and it starts with a description of an enormous burst of gamma rays detected from a satellite galaxy back in 1979. The flash, which for an eighth of a second produced more energy than all the rest of the stars in the Milky Way, was eventually ascribed to a neutron star that had swept up more interstellar dust than it could handle. The newt had contracted to a higher density and then vibrated wildly, producing electrons and

positrons which annihilated each other to spectacular effect.

I sigh impatiently. This is all well and good, but Wellspring is only twenty metres across, and gets fed just enough matter to produce the energy that runs our little world and keeps the scientists busy.

I abstract the data about the gamma burst and add it to my historical file. The note directly above it is one of my favourites: it is from *Scientific American* in 1971 and notes that a marshmallow falling into a neutron star would release as much energy as an atomic bomb. It then adds: "Fortunately for mankind neutron stars seem safely unharnessable."

The packet is already half full when it docks, mostly with students bound for the University. The pilot, a grinning zany who works thirty hours a month in the airscrubber plant, greets everyone by name. He spends most of his time on the canal, poling punts or running a packet.

I find a seat on the aisle – the outside ones are all taken – and ponder the matter of vocations as the last of the passengers embark. My own thirty a month is spent in administrative chores; my appointment as Project historian is semi-official. Yasmine and her colleagues spend most of their waking hours studying Wellspring, but you cannot expect others to find fulfilment in air maintenance.

When I joined the Project, thirty years ago, we drove ourselves like slaves but shaped a world like demigods. Wellspring was then a dense hydrogen cloud being drawn tighter by magnetic fields. Flavoured occasionally by comets we found and tossed in, it nevertheless gained mass slowly. Fieldscoops still ranged through the spaces beyond, magnetic funnels thousands of kilometres square that swept up the scant gases between planets. Enormous lightsails blew toward us from the Sun, gathering ions of solar wind in journeys that took years despite constant acceleration.

We lived in hollowed rocks and research habitats that hung in empty space, returning to Triton for extended leave every three years. The mass of our cloud was steadily contracted to the density of a gas giant, a star, a metal. Its beleaguered molecules, never heating despite their increasing density, approached the condition of ionized degeneracy, then collapsed under pressure into neutrons.

Genuine neutron stars pack twice the mass of the Sun into a ball ten kilometres across; our smaller model could fit into an auditorium. Nevertheless, it generates a gravity field great enough to crush anything that comes too close. At a distance of four kilometres an object would feel a pull equivalent to Earth's gravity; and at that distance we slipped a great hoop around its neutronium mass. The Equator, then only metres wide, resembled an arched bridge supported by the compression of its own inner curve. Stabilized by attitude jets, it was a surface you could walk upon feeling true Earth-level gravity, not the makeshift of spinning habitats, such as no one has known beyond the orbit of Earth.

The chronicler of such a world need never look back to her native land. The second and third hoops were added for stability, completing the gyroscope design that gave the world its name. While scientists dangled instruments from its underside to record the

energy released whenever Wellspring swallowed some new gram of matter, the topside of Gyro was enclosed and given life. Tiny suns, balls of fusing hydrogen on fast, short orbits, whipped like electrons around this framework world.

Someday further meridian rings will be added, until ultimately Gyro will be a solid shell, a hollow but genuine planet. Canopies will be abolished, for its atmosphere will be held down by simple gravity, as on Earth. One sun, I am sure, will suffice for this new world, which may even be given an axial tilt and seasons.

Maybe I will live to see such a world. Some of my younger friends have applied to have children when space becomes available, and I could become an old aunt to kids who play beneath a blue sky and scudding clouds.

The University buildings come into view, and nearly everyone debarks at the next two stops. Most of the research levels are underground, so I ride down and find Yasmine's lab. I sit outside and check the news on my scroll, and eventually notice that the class is running far past schedule. When the door is finally opened the people streaming out don't look like students; two I recognize as senior scientists. I catch Yasmine's eye as she comes out.

"Marta." She doesn't look at all happy to see me. "You have come at a bad time, I —"

I hold my scroll up. "Should I be recording this, for the historical record?"

Yasmine looks stricken. "My God, the last thing we need is a public outcry!"

"Yasmine," I say. "I am an historian, not a journalist — whose most sensational elements, by the way, already have some alarming story." At this she starts visibly, and I began to feel alarmed myself.

The corridor was now empty save for one of Yasmine's assistants, who looks at her significantly. "Excuse us," I tell him, and drag Yasmine off by one arm.

"I have been pondering the implications of Grishkin's piece in *Heavy Metal*," I lie smoothly as we head for her office. "Is that what this meeting was about?"

"In a way. There have been further readings since Grishkin's analysis." Yasmine lapses into preoccupation. I want to ask whether this poses some danger to Gyro, but remember that I have claimed her attention by distinguishing my interest from a reporter's.

I try prodding her. "Yasmine, Wellspring is supposed to be too heavy to erupt or anything."

She shakes her head, fretful at the thought. "The dynamics of Wellspring are simply not as predictable as with actual newts. The surface-volume ratio is radically different, and convection cycles move much faster." I begin to fear my pretence to knowledge is getting me in over my head, but Yasmine interrupts herself. "Who told you about this?"

"There is a story in the latest *Pulsar*, or perhaps tomorrow's." She looks at me sharply, and I said, "That's what I heard. I have no involvement myself."

"*Pulsar*," she mutters. "Ridiculous name; pulsars are reliable. Should be called *Degenerate Matter*." I don't wait for her to wonder why I have a confidant on the staff, and ask about the dangers of such instability.

"It's nothing to worry about," she says impatiently.

"Increased gamma emission may wear much harder on our instruments, but it can't reach the ecosphere. We are worried because these phenomena may interfere with our ability to record them."

My face is beginning to feel red. "So you have been holding emergency meetings, and someone concluded that disaster was imminent." I don't know whether to laugh or shake her. "Yasmine, when I saw your expression I was ready to believe it, too. I'm going to call up Peter Ghofrany and give him hell."

Yasmine is not ready to see any humour here. She wants to leave me at her office door, but I extract a promise to meet briefly tomorrow. Her haggard expression is piteous: it is easy to forget the immoderate passions of those who live only for the underside of Gyro, not the top.

The return boat takes considerably longer — it has to fight the current, which runs westward on the sun's heat — so I take the southside trolley. Since I've got a long ride I move inward and take a seat, but I stand to watch as we go past the new domes. With a technology that can execute any design, it is refreshing to watch someone expend a lot of energy to do something uncertainly and by hand. Delgado has one balloon fully distended, and has erected a scaffolding around it for the plasterers. The balloon's pink fabric is heavily mottled with the wet plaster, which glistens beside the five successively paler domes lining the boulevard.

Last year Delgado erected three domes almost within sight of my house, separate residences now painted in swirling pastels. Even fully cured they are faintly translucent, and at night one can easily see which has its interior lights on. One story that swept through the terrace slope like wildfire — Peter swears it is true — involves some early tenants who failed to appreciate how the unpainted walls can glow, and projected the enormous silhouette of their lovemaking through the side of their dome one evening.

With even the primitive air gauges he allows himself Delgado could inflate the domes to identical volumes, but he gains charming effect by measuring by eye. Afterwards the spectator can easily discern that the domes are all slightly different sizes.

I take the Chemesh Bridge for variety, and relieve my legs by riding a lift back to the upper terrace. It is early afternoon by Cyrus, which falls through my skylights in elongated rectangles that advance slowly across the floor. Since there are no seasons here, I could tell time in my bedroom by marking lines on the carpet.

An hour later Faisal arrives, bearing a posy grown at the food foundries. A romantic interlude. He spends much of his worktime examining seedling formations by hand, and I sometimes imagine I can smell the soul on his fingertips, ground into pores beyond the reach of soap. The sun creeps across his shoulders and finally stings my eyes, a radiance I sometimes imagine coinciding with that other incandescence, though I have never sought to contrive it.

In the evening I work on my notes, then pick up my favourite book. It has been set to *The Tale of Genji*, but I find myself unequal to its rigours and switch to a popular novel. When the volume begins to sag in my hands it is hours past sunset, and I snap off the light and crawl gratefully to my bed.

Something kicks at me hard, and I crash against the floor before fully waking. The entire house is shaking, and the floor shudders like the vibrato of a ship entering atmosphere. I scramble up, blinking in the darkness, and snap my fingers, but no light comes on. The air is filled with an impossibly huge sound.

"...Earthquake!" I hear someone cry. The pure lunacy of the thought thrills me into full alertness, and I crawl to the sliding door and try to look out my deck. Only a handful of lights are visible – jiggled into jerky lines – and as I watch they abruptly vanish. Something crashes into my head, stunning me for an instant, and I find myself covered with sandy grains. The window, I realize, has popped from its frame and fallen on me.

I crawl onto the deck, which I can recognize only by its feel beneath my palms. Suddenly it is tilting sharply, and I slide screaming into empty air.

I strike something hard, but it gives and I plunge through tatters to roll choking in a cloud of dust. Something huge is sliding against me, and in seconds I am pinned fast, hardly able to breathe. I am simultaneously immobilized and moving, for the ground is shuddering beneath me hard enough to rattle my teeth.

Earthquakes, I remember, last for less than thirty seconds, but this goes on and on. I can hear the terrace shaking itself to pieces. Blood rushes to my head as though to explode and I think, this is it, I am going to die.

In the darkness I cannot tell if I lost consciousness for a minute, but gradually I realize that something has slid loose, and I am not being crushed to death. The tremors have subsided, and around me I hear the sound of wreckage shifting and toppling.

I begin to slide my bruised ribs out from beneath the jumble atop it, which feels like a piling from my deck. I recognize the dust filling my nostrils: it is the rice paper my downslope neighbour used to panel most of his walls. I seem to be in the wreckage of his house, along with part of my deck.

Somewhere down the slope I can hear a voice crying out. I tug harder at my legs and gasp in pain: the right has been twisted badly, perhaps broken. I free them one at a time, whimpering as they scrape against the pressing rubbish.

No sound emerges from the ruins about me. I think suddenly of my poor neighbour, then remember that he works during the night hours. My own condition is harder to determine: my ankle is swollen and hurts fiercely, while several of the contusions over my body are wet to the touch. The wrap I had been wearing seems to have vanished.

I hobble over the steps and try to see through the cloud of suspended dust. Overhead the stars shine placidly, but downslope I can see only dim wavering lights, evidently hand torches on the high road. Cries and the creak of rubble rise through the darkness.

The next hours are a murky nightmare, tangling me in clammy sheets that block light but permit the passage of pain. I can hear Juana Sanchez calling for help, and in scrambling toward her house I slip and strike my head. Eventually a young man and I pull the rubble of her ceiling off her, but she has a crushed pelvis and possible internal injuries. A bedbug has crawled

from beneath her floorboards and attached itself to her hip, so we know she won't die of shock or sepsis. Minutes later we are scrabbling through the dusty wreckage of another bungalow when my energy abruptly drains as though from a broken cistern and I find myself resting my forehead on the ground. No effort will allow me to straighten up, and in fact I am lying on my back, staring at the stars.

The last thing I remember before I feel a bedbug touch my leg is trying to locate the Sun. At this distance it is no brighter than Sirius, but Gyro's position on the ecliptic should put it right over the canal. I am reasoning woozily through this when sleep steals over me, although imperfectly enough that I continue to hear the scrape of excavation around me, and feel cold rock knuckling against my back...

Dawn is seeping through dirty clouds, which hang in the reduced gravity of the upper air as though resolved never to come down. Everything is coated with grit. Someone has covered me with a sheet, and a scrap of mattress has been placed behind my head. I sit up, wincing as my head rings with pain.

Our terrace has been levelled, like sandcastle battlements kicked by a pettish child. Below the high road the larger buildings have fared better, doubtless because they were constructed to habitat standards and can withstand accelerations of several gravities. The fanciful additions to the roof of the Shcherbatsov building have been swept away, and Delgado's domes are broken, every one, and gape jaggedly at the sky like a carton of dropped eggs.

Hospitaliers have made it up to this level, and hover over the gravely injured like solicitous gravestones. A hundred metres away some poor soul has been surrounded by a clear bubble extruded by the hospitalier standing at his side, which is apparently conducting some major surgery. I wrap the sheet around me and feel surreptitiously under it for my bedbug, but it has completed its small ministries and dropped away.

A clensuit lies folded beside me, presumably left by some machine of loving grace. Its presence frightens me – do they expect a canopy breach? – but I realize after a second that in such a likelihood I would not have been left to sleep in the open. I normally loathe the things, but the thought of my wardrobe lying in the wreckage of my house prompts me to pull the suit on.

My muscles howl as I stumble through the rubble, but the thought of hundreds injured or dead drives the aches away. The terrace steps are choked with debris at some points and seem to have slid away at others. This does not bother me, for I am bound for the tubes. The lift itself is doubtless being pressed into continual service, but I remember the back-up, a shaft one metre across with spiralling steps too narrow to negotiate.

My worry that the entrances may be buried proves unfounded: these systems keep themselves clear during emergencies. Down the steps I go, discovering pains in muscles rarely pressed into service. I push open the door at the eighth level down.

The air is unexpectedly free of dust, and the level floor a pleasure to walk upon. People hurry to and fro, glancing at me with startled expressions and,

oddly, a touch of deference. Of course: not only do I look a dishevelled fright, but the clensuit suggests some official capacity in the relief efforts above.

I head towards the University with a growing limp – we are below canal level and the gravity exceeds Earth's – and commandeer the first empty cart that whines past. I nearly fall asleep in the cushioned seat.

Yasmine is in the Gravitational Labs, which I learn by barking at some young man with a scroll. I find the room and stump past rows of researchers at machines, like a peg-legged Captain reviewing his sailors. Yasmine is bent over the eyepiece of some large instrument, and I grasp her by the elbow.

"How much did you suspect, you little liar?" I demand. I want to shake her.

Yasmine stares for a second as though she doesn't recognize me. Her eyes are bloodshot and hollowed. "Marta," she finally exclaims, looking me up and down. "Were you hurt?"

"Not as badly as six hundred others." She flinches at this, which I also got from the scroll. "You wanted to keep your concerns quiet for some political reason, didn't you?"

"Leave her alone." Yasmine's companion is an angry-looking young man in a torn researcher's tunic. "You know nothing about this."

"That's because I was lied to." We all glare at each other for a few seconds.

The man points at Yasmine's eyepiece. "Wellspring has given rise to radically unpredictable oscillations never observed in more massive singularities. Tentative models based on new data –"

The ground heaves below us. I give a little shriek and stumble, reflexes too slow in the higher gravity. Voices are calling out across the room; the researchers seem divided between looking to their instruments and fleeing. The floor thrums as though some irregular generator were powering up beneath us.

I stagger towards the door, suddenly desperate to reach open air. In fact the crowded room seems quite safe: none of the frail-looking instruments topple, and one scientist braces herself with feet spread as she grasps her eyepiece in both hands.

I reach the hallway, where a dozen people are caught in a vibrating frieze of varying postures and expressions. A black-skinned man with Emergency Corps insignia is on his feet and moving purposefully when he sees me. Plainly the closed-environment suit lends me some authority, for he grabs my arm as I trip forward. "Upside?" he asks.

"You got it, Corporal," I say.

He strides forward, pulling me along, for a dozen metres, then taps the side of a rectangle incised in the wall. A door slides open and he pushes me through. "Good luck." The doors closes upon darkness, and an immediate rush of acceleration surges through my soles. I am ascending.

The door slides open and a wave of white noise breaks over me. The platform before me is shivering, and as I step from the insulated capsule its tremors run through me like an electric current.

Outside an amplified voice is calling over the ubiquitous rumble. When I get to the station door I can make out the words, which I know by memory.

"– vided to you as quickly as possible. Please continue to assist relief workers while awaiting your call.



Closed environment attire will be distributed to all..."

It is the evacuation protocol, laboriously drafted by a committee whose deliberations I once observed. Its sonorous cadences roll across the broken valley like a pronouncement of doom.

I am standing at a station on the southern low road, a dozen metres from the canal. Both terraces are in ruins, with virtually no structures standing above their middle reaches. The flatland between the high roads fared better: the street before me is filled with debris, but none of it from collapsed buildings.

The vibrations are slowly subsiding, and across the street two faces peek from a doorway. Across the land the rumble continues: the creak of joints undergirding the world, absorbing what forces they can. I raise my eyes to the sky, but a haze of fine dust remains in the air: if rescue vehicles are falling toward us, they are still invisible.

On the high road I encounter an evacuation work crew. They have slid back a length of road for perhaps ten metres, exposing a deep cavity through which a mass of machinery has risen. A queue of citizens stretches away on the hole's far side, and I realize that a food line has been set up. Tattered and shaken, they look like refugees from some past war.

A man in the work crew sees me and waves. It is Trygve Vigeland, whom I know slightly. I hobble toward him.

"Glad to see you're well," he says, and hands me a mug. It is warm in my hand, and I raise it to discover soup.

The ground quivers beneath us for a second, and I jump, then realize that it is the workings of machinery below. Trygve smiles briefly.

"Lost your scroll, eh?" he remarks as I drink. "And with history happening all around you."

"I don't need a scroll to remember this."

He nods solemnly. "I think we'll be out in ten hours," he adds, looking around him. "Get the suits out, decompress, blow. The shuttles are being readied now." He points across the water to Meridian's north edge, where the top of the terrace meets the Canopy.

"The end," I say, I can't believe it.

He shrugs. "The Expansionists would have won out anyway. Now it'll just happen twenty years early." He holds out his hand for the empty cup. "Gotta go." We grasp each other's arms awkwardly for a second, the cup getting in the way, then he turns back to his work.

I wander along the towpath, then cross a bridge – intact but its pediments fallen away like crumbled icing – back to the north side. I have a vague notion of recovering my scroll, but cannot take my eyes off the ruins around me. The streets are filled with people: nobody wants to return indoors. Most look dazed or anxious; some are crying.

Nobody looks seriously hurt: the terraces are where the injuries occurred. The preliminary casualty list gave no true deaths, but I can easily imagine the deepest rubble still containing victims. Some futile impulse urges me to ascend the slopes and give aid, but I would only get in the way of machines.

Trygve is right. The Expansionists – who want to

set Gyro out at a greater distance, adding to the rings as you would let out a waistband – will now have their way. After everyone is gone, the rings will be sectioned and neatly lifted to higher orbits. They will join the cloud of orbital matter surrounding our hand-wrought world, material for a newer, larger one. At half again the distance, the envisioned sphere would be more than twice the area of a filled-in Gyro, though with less than half the gravity. Those who never lived on Earth find this acceptable, and doubtless they are right.

I wonder what will become of my compatriots, four thousand souls whose work is crumbling beneath their feet. Most will spend the next year in crowded transport, to Triton or perhaps Pluto-Charon. Unlit worlds, composed of frozen volatiles unable to tolerate the heat of tiny suns. I will probably keep my historian's assignment, and record Gyro's last days from an overhead habitat.

Ahead of me I can see the curved shards of Delgado's domes, their eggshell surfaces the only buildings at this level to fall. That is our world, I think suddenly: a fragile thing, broken by cosmic forces. The conceit is fatuous but I cannot help it, and in a second tears have welled up and my shoulders are shaking. It is an unseemly occasion for a wallow, and I stop it thinking of poor Juana with her blanched grimace and broken bones.

A thrum runs beneath our feet, and people shriek. A second later a crash rolls off the hill: just the tremor of collapsing wreckage. As the concussion dissolves into the dusty air, I watch the uplift of startled gulls over the canal and remember the sonic booms of my childhood on Earth: the vagaries of atmospheres with outward curvature, where sound waves can race around a world.

Gregory Feeley makes his *Interzone* fiction debut with the above story. But he is already well known to readers of this magazine as an interviewer (conversations with John Crowley, Thomas M. Disch, John Sladek, Greg Bear, Terry Bisson, Howard Waldrop), and to readers of the critical journal *Foundation* for his acerbic reviews and essays. He has also written a science-fiction novel, *The Oxygen Barons*, which has appeared in the USA and Japan and was shortlisted for a 1990 Philip K. Dick Award. He lives in Hamden, Connecticut.

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page 3.**

The Hauler-In

Susie M.

Alan Heaven

I can't look at the wooden slats of the conveyor without smelling the mingled urine and blood of the cattle and hearing the rattle of the turning spindles where the black men knot over in the shadows and wind in their lives, turning the handles two to a side, four to each end, all morning and all the evening until the dying light extinguishes them.

Jacques ("say it Jake's, spell it French") has taken inside handle left of the dumper since I was a runner who hooked the flapping legs or heads back on to the belt and pushed the pile ups through the flaps to the butchery. There's ruts worn where his fingers close on the wood. He's the oldest one here and hard as winter itself. The Governor knows that he's the one who decides how much goes through no matter what any Foreman might say. Jacques knows the right things to do to pacify the pair of them. He just squints down the side of his face and purses his lips and says, "Ah got French ah-risto-crat blood in me an there ain't nobody kin match me fer that." Then he turns the handle and the muscles in his hunched back throb like crazy and the Governor and the Foreman just grin at each other and shake their heads.

Jacques is there when I swagger past. Charlie's on left and the Boyce twins opposite. I hawk up a chew on to some trundling meat and Jacques cackles like it's the funniest thing since Christmas. "You goin up in th' worl' girlie. Lookit you kick them legs like all was set an sealed already! How'd you know what the boss's going to send through? Could be some rutter or a calf maybe an zap! there goes your name, your future, your legs."

I tell him to trust in God like he ought and I'll trust in the deal with the Governor. I'm signed on for forty year just for this chance at making Third Hauler. Jacques is a good man but there's no way I'm going to stay in the same job all my life just to wear in some corner of power. When the opening came up I was first in line. Deal is I get one shot at one animal. Screw up and it's back to the flaying crew. Win through and I get the job plus the usual bonus of the hind legs, full-hooved and muscles intact, which first-timers always have got since the beginning of time. After that maybe Second Hauler some day, then First, then Section Foreman. The whole damned world's waiting for me and all I got to do is pull a cow's head through the loop so's it can be drained kosher.

Jacques is right of course. The Governor could send some yearling through to me, which don't carry no respect amongst the rest of the Abattoir. He's got that right if he don't like the guy and wants to be able to

push him on and off Hauler quick for some reason. The rule is that you got to give respect and have earned respect or there's bad feeling and low production and all that hassle. Today is like a half holiday for everyone while I face the animal so everyone'll be in the shed watching and expecting a good show. I'm not about to let them down.

The windowless west wall is all the view the Governor gets when he and his fat daughters swelter over beer and hot bread behind the glass and the wrist-thick vines which have grown up through the floor of the conservatory, fed by old blood and such I guess. The glass is tripled to keep out the sound of the animals as they are led or harried from the pound through the iron doors to the cages. I see the fattest of the daughters cramming her mouth with meat as I head for the back door to Bay One. She's wearing nothing but wool gloves and pretending not to notice the men who're following behind me. That girl is on heat all the time, getting a rise from choosing the biggest bull and slitting the throat herself, then slobbering over the butchered gobbets and jerking off. She hates me. There's not many women she can tolerate. As the guys go by they bend their heads or look the other way out of politeness, pretending they don't see anything either. Me, I give her the finger. This is my day and nothing's interfering. I feel nearly the whole place is breathing on my neck by the time I reach the door and when I turn round out of curiosity they all cheer and whistle, 'cept old Jacques who looks worried and tells me I shouldn't've done that to the fat daughter. I see the Governor and his crew not far off and they don't look too happy but I wave anyway and stroll into the Bay.

The air is choking. Apparently it takes months to get used to the stink that steams out of the cattle and horses that come through here. It clings to the corrugated walls like sweat on flesh and has turned them rust red despite the coating. Takes me a short while to recover my bearings and get used to breathing through my mouth instead of the nose: that way the smell isn't so bad though you end up with no taste after a few years. Who needs it anyway? But soon I can see Tolly waiting by the rig. He's the present Third Hauler who's on the way down after the accident two days back when a longhorn ripped open his balls and four men had to hold him down till the surgeon was finished.

"Susie M." he says by way of greeting. He's got pale and you can tell he can't hack it in here no more. The

word has it that the Governor's offered him a place bone-stirring for glue, which is about as low as you can get here. By the look of him he's no use anywhere else and there's no other Abattoir would take on a man who'd gone scared. "You want me to run over this once more?"

"Makes no difference to me," I tell him.

I can hear the people cramming in now. There's two platforms along the top where maintenance can get to the machine if there's any problems up there. Most will be on them, the rest looking through from the animal's side where the two Goaders are waiting.

Tolly points to the frame. It's about twelve feet across and ten high, shaped like a thick iron doorway. Flush with it on the other side is the metal collar which closes around the cow's neck. The flooring around here is a tiny grille so's the blood will run through into the channels below and from there into the collecting ducts where the next crew get to work. Leading up to the frame is a smooth metal walkway with high sides that meet at a sort of roof about level with the top of the frame. The effect is of a box at the end of an aisle with a space between the box and the frame.

The principle is simple enough. Most animals you can take out with a few slugs from a hammer in the large sheds but some are for special uses: maybe they're for aphrodisiacs, or medicines, or plain kosher food; or maybe they just aren't co-operating in the sheds. This is more usual. For whatever reason they get brought along individually to the Bays and the two Goaders prod each along till it reaches the frame. If there's no problem it'll just shove its head through looking for food or something and the collar will clamp around its neck as soon as the Section Foreman pulls the lever. That traps it pretty well so next he lowers the roof of the box and withdraws the whole contraption, collar and all, until it's clear of the frame. Then the Goaders spin the box upside down – because it's all oiled and pivoted well – so the cow's throat's conveniently exposed and the Hauler slits it wide. Easy.

But that's not the Hauler's real job. Often the animal just won't put its head through the frame, and that's when someone has to give it some help. Sticking across from half way up the sides of the frame are two adjustable foot rests.

"You put one foot on each of these," Tolly says, "then extend them away from the frame. You'll be sittin' on this seat where the lever to adjust them is. F'r God's sake don't get the distance wrong. Them longhorns...yeah, anyway jus' be careful. Soon as you get the hooks in its head lean back an' pull. The Foreman'll do the rest. An don't rip the ears or eyes, you hear me Susie M.?"

"You know what he's sending?" I ask.

"Was a stallion last I heard. Fine legs. My first was a stallion."

"I see that."

There's a commotion overhead and I look up to see what's happening. There's a lot of activity around the Section Foreman's chair at the end of the platform. The air's so thick it's hard to see clearly but where I'm expecting to see Docker sitting is someone else instead. At first I think it's Jacques since I hear his voice loud enough then the fog sort of moves aside and I see fat daughter squatting there like some toad.

I can make out the lipsticked gash of her mouth working double time as she gums out chat with some of the guys, pretending she's one of them though it would take three from the bone team or two like me to match her for bulk and any one of the cattle to beat her intellect. She's Daddy's best girl and swells on the power it gives her. Once she was married, I recall, to a Chinaman with one arm who built walls; which is why there is so much iron and stone around here, dividing and directing and pushing us in half-mile circuits to reach next door unless you're a Foreman and have some keys. Jacques reckons it's a way of controlling us, like the hierarchies in sections in divisions and all that, but what she and the Governor don't get is that we make our own code here and it's nothing to do with walls and keys.

Stuff clatters on the grille and bounces off my shirt. Tolly grins like a corpse and I can smell the pain and fear on him just as strong as on any cow. He's a keen sense of irony which is why I like him: they're throwing vertebrae which is what you do when someone needs good luck and for Tolly it's come too late. The next bit I don't go for much but it has to be done. Tolly's supposed to help me up into the saddle, which is about five feet off the ground on a pole and there's no way he can do this given his injury, so he has to crouch down like a slave and let me stand on his spine and head until I'm up. It feels like he's going to fall apart when I hug him; after handling bulls and stallions a man's made of straw by comparison. On that I agree with fat daughter. I'm up in a jump.

There's no back to the seat and at first it feels precarious but the crowd all whoop and try to knock me off with their bits of bone and generally make me so full of myself that I can't admit the way my guts are churning and the world's wobbling, not even in my own mind. Up here the perspective is different. This is what I want the job for: I can feel the loneliness of it. My strength against half a ton of muscle that's going to hammer towards my groin with enough force to rip me open – unless the collar stops him in time. It's like being a saint ready for martyring and all you've got to rely on is yourself and God. The catch is, God ought to be sitting where fat daughter is now.

I can see along the steel walkway between the sides to where flaps of black plastic hang over the doorway. There's no sign of my Goaders, so we must be close to starting. They'll be outside with the Governor getting the beast primed up to come through. My boots settle snugly into the rests and I play with the levers, getting the feel of the distances. The rests extend quickly, pushing the seat smoothly backwards as long as I keep my legs flexed.

"You want to be far enough back to be clear of the head and neck combined and remember these creatures can stretch like hell to get at you when you've got the hooks in. Get the distance wrong and there's nothing anyone can do to help you, except yer collar man and sometimes not even him." Tolly smiled and hesitated, unsure whether or not he should say more. The fat daughter was playing with the collar controls, snapping it open and shut just the other side of the frame. "So much hangs on yer rapport with him... Docker's OK, Susie M. There's no-one handles the collar better. Get through this and you'll be with a good team... It's time. I got to go."

There is a reason he's lingering. At first I thought he wanted to be a part of the smell and the excitement one last time but that doesn't equate with the fear oozing from him. It takes me a while to click; only when he unwraps a long bundle lying at the base of the rig does it make sense. He pulls two bows of oily string and opens the rag along creases worn by ritual folding. Inside are two steel bars about four feet long. Each has a blackened, greasy handle at one end and five razor barbs curving out of the other. "Until you get your own," he says quietly.

I take the hooks with the reverence he expects and the crowd go crazy. I can hear old Jacques whistling and stamping like he's at a stripjoint.

There's a catch which you can press to give an extra foot extension, otherwise the only mechanism is in the handles themselves. I twist one and the barbs spring out so fiercely the hook almost jumps out of my hand. Turning it the other way is harder but retracts them again. They are much heavier than I anticipated but are weighted near to the handles so when I lean forwards I still have absolute control over the barbed tips.

"You better move now, Tolly," I say. "It looks like I ought to start." I wait until he's out of the area then cross my hooks above my head to signify readiness and all hell on earth breaks loose.

I started here when I was seven, climbing through the blood ducts to scrape them clean. By nine I was on to scrubbing out the pots and cauldrons and three years after that I joined the old women in the tanning sheds. That was a skilled job I could have taken to. Those women made it look like an art, which I suppose it was since they turned out hides of real beauty. All I did was the pegging but the atmosphere was good and I enjoyed my work. Soon after I started to grow all of a sudden and in a couple of months I was the tallest girl there. The Foreman took to me and I shared his bed until I got pregnant when he set me pulling the hides through the presses which is back-breaking work and had the desired effect as far as he was concerned of making me lose the baby. I hold nothing against him, in fact I owe him a lot. He was a gambler and it was him who first introduced me to Jacques, hoping I'd lay the old guy and learn how he charmed Lady Luck onto his side. I never did either, but I took to going about with the two of them and their cronies when the heat was on for a session. That had to be quiet and secret, which got harder as the walls started going up. Eventually they hit on the best spot: the Bays.

By masquerading as corpse pullers or maintenance or whatever they thought would fool the Governor and his Chief Foremen they were able to watch while the Hauler went about his business. This meant bets on how long it would take for the collar to close; the chance of a ripped ear; how much blood; the duration of the left-hand hook; you name it. Pretty soon watching the Haulers became a major activity and there was special evening meets laid on when lifetimes of money changed hands.

All I cared about was the spectacle. Those Haulers were heroes to me and I screwed every one of them ten times over and when I couldn't get them I went for the collar men instead. That's how I fell foul of

the fat daughter; Bernice her name is. She wanted the same men I did only I was getting there first. If she ever knew I had her Chinaman I'd be next on the Butchers' tables. I see blood in her eyes all the time.

This is no stallion riving the steel floor but fifteen hundredweight of malevolent black bull.

The shoulders are hunched higher than my head, shining with sweat and blood where the Goaders have been at work. I've never seen a monster like it. Despite the heat and closeness of the shed and the screams of the men and the whips and prods of the Goaders who are dancing the other side of the railings trying to usher it between the steel walls, it takes only a couple of steps through the plastic strips and stops, for all the world as though it's thinking. Then it hurls its mountain of bone and hide against the railings hard enough to buckle bars which have withstood a generation of crazed animals without damage. Again and again, battering the same place until the top bar has snapped clean off and the others look set to go.

I find I've pushed my saddle right back from the frame without realizing it. It takes all the courage I can find to gauge the distance I need to be from the collar and lock the rests in place. Working out the right distance is something which can only come from experience so I'm riding on Jacques' lucky presence and Tolly's advice and what little I can remember from my younger man-hunting days. I need to focus my mind on the job, to forget all about Bernice who's rigged this to watch me get split open or humiliated. I can't shake free of my dependence upon her. Either way she's won. If she collars the bull it's the clearest statement of her power over my life you could wish to see. If she lets it through... I need to focus. I look at the hind legs of my opponent. They belong to me. My tokens of triumph forever. I'll cut them from it myself and all its strength will become mine. As if it knows what I'm thinking the bull roars as it rushes the bars once more and the noise is engulfed by an answering one from the crowd. Cans crack open and the first beers froth over the platform.

Snick-Snack – the younger of the two Goaders – reacts to the last attack with a stroke of genius. When the bull turns to check out the damage it's caused she swings her prod in sideways and cuts its eye like a ripe tomato. That does the trick. Blinding makes it lose all sense and it hurtles straight along the walkway, massive flanks pressing the steel walls and shining them with blood. The speed is astounding. I'm not ready for the noise or the sheer brutality of its attack but it looks as if the game will be won by me without my doing anything more than sitting, legs braced wide, waiting for it to put its thunderous head through the frame.

At the last moment it twists and crashes into an upright. I can feel the whole rig judder and sway under the blow. Then the bull stops dead. Mucous spills from the leather nose and foam from lips as pale as my own. Where the eye was only gore remains but the other is whole and red, hidden deep amongst valleys of ancient flesh like the Devil's foundry in the hills of Gomorrah. The head is so immense I can't perceive it at a glance but must look from the ears and soldered horns down the bloody conduit and across

a jaw that champs and licks with terrible reality scant inches from my ankle. I can't look away. The iron gaze binds me. Slowly, I reach out with the hooks, keeping them high above its eyeline, and hold position like a claw above its head.

The stillness is absolute. No-one is breathing or moving save me and the bull.

It shrugs and takes a half pace backwards, suspicious of the woman who sits in mid air before it. I lower the hooks, gently.

"Sssh. Sssh. Hush now, fellah." I'm talking and humming and God knows what and all the time looking deep into its solitary eye where pus has gathered along the lid and been soldered by malice into a crust.

The barbs are either side of its head. I scratch with the tips, back and forth. Back and forth. Calm and rhythmic. The flesh is wire-bristled and midnight, pocked by old wounds which pulse deeply as the air is bellowed in and out and muscles flex suspiciously. I tuck the hooks behind the cheekbones where there are hollows. This isn't the best place but my nerves are raw and I can't bear to search for anywhere better. The sound of the tips rubbing the skin is like nails scraping sandpaper.

I twist both handles sharply and the barbs drive into the bone. The bull hurls itself backwards, roaring and howling, and I'm almost yanked through the frame until I lean back and pull. The strain on my arms is so great I don't know any way I'm going to keep hold of the handles at first, then I get the feel of the rhythm of the beast's bucking and move with it, pulling and tensing as the need arises. We move like one being, thrashing within a cage of iron and slavering faces.

Beer cans and bottles buckle and shatter on its skull with no more effect than if they had been plastic. All it knows is me and the grip on its head. The men are in ecstasy and their unsuppressed energy flows through me. Already I'm no puppet but a master: my will directs the bull's, my body clings and bites, where it rips with the strength of engines I pull and demand with the power of pain. It shakes me from side to side, leaps, bucks, roars, shoots fire from its eye, sulphur from its nostrils; a titan bound by wires. I will not release my grip and screech unheard to Bernice to clamp the collar down even as I heave with all my power to wrench its horns closer.

Suddenly it slips. The polished curves of the grille deny a grip from hooves and I feel the bull slide towards me. It feels the same inexorability and lets loose with a bellow that could tear your ears off before switching tactics and surging straight through the frame, through the collar, its shoulder barging the iron aside and the world goes red as I feel its breath on my face and know the fat daughter has left the collar untouched.

When the haze clears I feel hands moving me. Some are groping as you'd expect. I'm going to throw up.

The bull is there. Collar tight around its neck and the box already turning it upside down for the final cut. Fat daughter is ready with the knife. I despise her for saving me and try to say as much but my supporters won't let me. They are flushed and panting

and smiling as if they had beaten the animal themselves, that or just come from an orgy.

I get a final glimpse of my adversary fighting death even to the last pull of the blade. It deserved better than sacrifice at the hand of Bernice. Despite all my years at this slaughterhouse I still feel for the creature. I wish there could have been a draw somehow. "Just bein' here is death," Tolly calls, as if he can read my mind, and right away I start to laugh cause it's so true.

It's not until I'm outside being carried through the open air and breathing deep and clear again that I catch sight of Jacques being congratulated as much as I am myself. Turns out he's wagered with the Governor: his job against a full day's holiday for all. Not to mention winning a fortune in illegal side bets.

Someone says that it was him who clamped the collar, not Bernice. There was so much hubbub nobody knows for sure, though, and Jacques never gives anything away.

Me, I'm on my way up and that's all that matters. This is my world, my society no matter what the Governor thinks. The legs of that bull are all mine and he has to pay for the grafting.

You want to see me swagger? Watch then. I'll have legs finer than Tolly's stallion ones, finer than any Hauler ever born. And then arms or sinews or hands like Jacques'. Watch me go! Some day Section Foreman, then maybe Division Foreman, and after that... I can hardly wait.

Alan Heaven is a British writer, new to us, who says that he contributed fiction to the short-lived *Imagine* magazine back in the early 1980s. Born in 1959, he is married with one child, and lives and teaches near York. (And no, he's not a pseudonym for Steven Widdowson - "The Nexus," IZ 36 - whose brief biographical details seem very similar.)

WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letters column in each issue. Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.

The Leading American SF Editor

Stan Nicholls talks to Gardner Dozois

Gardner Dozois, writer, anthologist, and editor of Isaac Asimov's *Science Fiction Magazine*, naturally places a high premium on short stories. "I've always had the feeling that shorts are where most of the really evolutionary work takes place in science fiction," he says.

Sf as a recognizable genre developed largely from short fiction published in specialist magazines, and while the influence of the magazines has waned in recent times, he still regards the form as a vital seedbed for new talent. "Short fiction is...perhaps not dead, but clearly ailing in mainstream literature, and you have to go to areas like mystery and sf to find anything resembling a healthy market. Why this is I really don't know, but that's pretty much the way it's been over the last twenty or thirty years.

"What really influences the future evolution of science fiction is usually done on that level, however, and usually by young, mostly unknown writers who aren't paid very much for it. It doesn't matter what's at the top of the bestseller list at Dalton's or W.H. Smiths; that's not what is influencing other writers, and moulding the taste of the readership."

Speaking as a writer, he has always preferred the short form himself. "Some writers are natural novelists and tend to think easily and organically in those terms. I'm a natural short-story writer, and in many ways the skills of being a good short-story writer sort of work against you as a novelist. I'd be far more likely to condense a four-hundred-page manuscript into a four-thousand-word manuscript than the other way around, which many of the novels I see these days seem to have had happen to them."

Given the importance of short fiction, how does he explain the paradox that, in this country at least, sf anthologies and magazines sell so badly? "You'd need a sociological dissertation to explain why people don't seem to be as into short fiction as they were in the past, although it's somewhat healthier in the States in that there are still several different markets. One of the unfortunate things is that people have turned away from short

fiction and toward novels. It's perhaps not accidental that novels themselves have got longer and longer and tended to spawn sequels in infinitely regressive series.

"Someone told me once that they didn't like to read short stories because it was cosier to wrap oneself in a six-hundred-page novel. That may be part of what's going on here. Short fiction is much more startling, and you don't have time to settle cosily into a three-thousand-word story with a razor ending. I think many people go to reading now as the equivalent of turning on a television channel for white noise in the background."

Could this be the reason formula fantasy is so popular at the moment too, with its comfort factor? "Yes, although like anything else of course good fantasy can be very good indeed; it all depends on the talent of the writer. I'm unhappy with generalizations like 'Fantasy is this' or 'Science fiction is that' because they can be as routine or as various as possible depending on who's writing them."

Gardner Dozois' career has certainly been various. He was in the US Army in the 60s, stationed in Germany, where he worked as a military journalist. "Although military journalist is one of those oxymorons," he says, "like military intelligence. It was a somewhat surreal experience, because the basic function of military journalism is to report the innocuous news, rather than the really important news. It's sort of a combination of propagandist and PR man. I suspect it's much like working for a house organ of some major corporation, where your function is to generate a lot of cheerful chatter about how wonderful the company and the people in it are, while ignoring most of the real issues."

"That experience has been a help in my subsequent work, but it's seldom as cut and dried with fiction as it is with journalism. Sometimes even when you have a deadline the muse refuses to cooperate. Other than that I would say it was an experience that was useful to me in several respects. Although I didn't see it that way at the time. But then life tends to be like that. You don't appreciate the hideous

things while you're going through them, but afterwards you can always say to yourself, 'Well, I can use this in my fiction.'"

When he left the services in the early 70s he primarily made his living as a publishers' reader. "I worked for Dell Books and Award Books. I also was the first reader for several years at the UPD Group, which at that time published *Galaxy*, *Worlds of If*, *Worlds of Tomorrow* and *Worlds of Fantasy*. I read the slush pile on all those magazines at one point."

Was that also good training, if only in learning what not to do in his own fiction? "Yes, it was and is very useful in that respect. It certainly helped hone my skills as an editor. This is going to sound callous, but one of the things extensive experience reading a slush pile teaches you is not to waste too much time over things that are obviously unusable. A good first reader shouldn't take more than a minute or two to dispose of an obviously terrible manuscript."

"Often you can judge the quality of a story by the letter that comes with it, although to be fair I try to take at least a quick peek at the manuscript itself as well. But if an author is unintelligent or untalented, or downright loony, it often shows up in the covering letter as well as the manuscript, so it's an indication of what you're going to run into inside. Some submissions list all the places that have turned down the manuscript before you got it, and some people even attach rather nasty rejection letters they've garnered from other publishers, which seems like a strange thing to do. Another strategy is to tell you what a jerk, a fool and a cretin you are, because you could never possibly appreciate what you're about to have unfolded before you."

Dozois began to build a reputation as a writer in the 70s, with a collection of short stories and two novels: *Nightmare Blue* (1975), with George Alec Effinger, and his solo effort *Strangers* (1978). He took over Dutton's *Best Science Fiction Stories of the Year* from Lester del Rey and edited five volumes before the series was cancelled. After that, Tor employed him to edit *The Year's Best Science Fiction*, which

under his guidance has become arguably the preeminent annual survey of the field. In 1985 he succeeded Shawna McCarthy as editor of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, where he receives approximately one hundred and fifty unsolicited manuscripts a week.

Asimov himself has only a minimal editorial input on the magazine. "He really doesn't have anything to do with picking the contents. If there's some controversial topic we may seek his opinion, but I would say for the most part he doesn't dabble. For which I'm grateful. It's hard to exercise editorial judgement if you have somebody hanging over your shoulder. He gives me the freedom to choose what I think ought to go in. That's a very wise and enlightened policy on his part, since it's his name that goes on the cover.

"He's always been very supportive of our choices, even when there have been stories he would not have chosen himself; he's been supportive of things like the use of explicit sex, violence and obscene language, even though these don't figure much in his own fiction. He certainly could have imposed a more sanitary aesthetic style on his magazine if he wanted to. But Isaac has been smart enough to leave his editors alone, trust them, and give them some room to operate. I think the record has shown that was probably the right thing to do."

Dozois' latest project is *The Legend Book of Science Fiction*. "[Legend imprint editor] Deborah Beale and I were talking at Worldcon in Boston and got around to the idea of doing a sort of retrospective collection covering the last thirty years or so. There's no real polemical or dialectical thrust behind the selection, except that they were stories I liked, and which have stuck in my mind."

Is this the criterion he applies generally as an editor, tending toward stories which appeal to him as a reader? "Yes it is. But you have to temper that a little. When you're editing a magazine you need to get a wide spectrum of material into every issue, and you need to strike a balance between the sorts of material you publish. I like to get as much variation into one issue as possible, but certainly won't buy anything I don't like. If you try to buy for theoretical reasons you're going to end up in trouble.

"Perhaps I'm somewhat naive in this regard, but I have never thought writers can callously hack out something they don't believe in or don't have any emotional stake in and have it come out good. Writers are more likely to produce good work if they're not knocking off a piece of crap to make a fast buck. The same is true with editing. You have to respect your audience as intelligent adults, and you have to respect yourself as an editor or writer

in order to produce worthwhile material."

The best editors have an indefinable instinct, a "nose" for a story, developed over long experience. "Yes, it's like the old joke - 'I don't know anything about art but I know what I like,'" he agrees. "I can always tell when I'm onto a really good story because I'll lose track of the fact that I'm supposed to be evaluating it, and just read it with my pores open receptively, as a reader. If it can do that to me I know it can do it to the readership of the magazine too.

"John W. Campbell and the other editors in the field are talked about a lot, but we forget it's the writers who do all the work. It's the editor's job to be receptive to what they are doing, and perhaps help them to express themselves a little more clearly if they've stumbled over the mechanics of the plot; but basically, if you like the magazine it's because you like what the writers are doing, not because you like what the editor is doing."

He believes his role is knowing good writing when he sees it, and not trying to generate it in the first place. "This is where I differ from an editor like Campbell. Campbell used writers to work with his ideas. He was expressing himself through other people, and imposing his vision on the material. I'm not interested in doing that. I want to see what the writers have to say. The notion that I would assign ideas to authors who then go off and write them up is an alien concept to me.

"In this respect my experience as an anthologist has helped me to some degree as a magazine editor. For one thing I think of issues of the magazine as anthologies, and contribute a lot of touches of balance and resonance that probably most of the audience doesn't notice. I've always thought of myself as a conduit through which the good material I'm in the position to recognize passes along to the readership."

The amount of help he can offer an author whose work is not quite up to scratch depends entirely on the individual situation. "Some manuscripts come across my desk and go into the magazine without a word being altered. Others need work, and on those occasions I attempt to help the author. Not in imposing my own vision but in clarifying or sharpening what I see as the vision inherent in the story in the first place. In those cases, which are moderately rare, we can go through three or four rewrites before we have a draft that satisfies both of us."

Are there common faults? "Well, of course there are many such flaws, from clichéd material that's been recycled dozens of times to lack of fundamental writing ability. One of the errors new writers make is their very weak, passive openings, and the real story, if it

starts at all, doesn't begin until six or seven pages into the manuscript. This can be a mistake because you have to picture an editor sitting in a room surrounded by hundreds of manuscripts and evaluating them. He's not going to give more than a few minutes to each one. You have to involve him from the start if you want to survive long enough to have your contribution read in a more thorough fashion.

"You've got to convince whoever first sets eyes on your manuscript that it's worth paying any unusual degree of attention to. Many stories are essentially colourless and fail in that regard. I like stories with sweep, conflict and dramatic action; I mean, I'm a fairly fundamental type of reader. It's amazing how many stories in the slush pile go on interminably about nothing much in particular."

As here, American publishers have reached the conclusion that sf has been over-published and are cutting back, particularly their mid-lists. "I can't help but think that the mid-lists are the things you probably shouldn't cut; you should cut some of the crap at the top. But this is not a view that is going to travel very far among publishing circles.

"The problem is not that there is no good work of quality being done, because there is such work being done, but that it has to compete so for rack display space against the flood of associational garbage. The average non-fan reader coming into a bookstore must be bewildered, and perhaps disgusted and frustrated, with the attempt to pick something worth reading. I don't know what can be done about that, although I suspect if the situation persists long enough the book market will retrench, and perhaps then it will be somewhat easier to find worthwhile material.

"A lot of the problem can be blamed on the timidity and short-sightedness of many of the commercial publishers. When you publish fiction cynically, with an idea that the audience are morons, you get a product fit for morons. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. I think there is a large segment of the audience who are more sophisticated than that, and would respond to being treated in an adult fashion.

"When I was editing the 'Isaac Asimov Presents' novel series I got at least three manuscripts nobody else would touch because they were too weird, too subtle, too offbeat, etcetera; and those were the three books in the line that did the best and got the most acclaim. So it seems to me many of the publishers are underestimating the taste of their audiences by a considerable factor.

"Publishing was taken over to a large extent in the 70s by bottom-line oriented corporate cost accountants, making for a difficult climate in which

to foster individuality. Because of course they're not looking for that. They're looking for predictable product where you know before you publish it how many units you're going to move. It's very hard to do that with fiction in any sort of reliable way. So what they do at times like this is, instead of putting emphasis on the unusual material that might interest the perhaps somewhat jaded readership, they worsen the situation by going down the list and getting rid of all the books that don't fit into some narrow specialized mode they think they can predict. It's sort of a Gresham's Law situation, where the more panicked the publishers get about sales the more likely they are to weed out the very books that might generate new audiences, and concentrate on what they think are tried and true selling formulas. But these formulas are usually exhausted, and the thing that's turning the audience away in the first place."

To some extent science fiction is seen by people who haven't read much of it as being an overly-insular genre, and fans are still perceived as having little interest in other fields. Is this fair? "It's hard to tell what the literacy level of the readership is. I've been sneered at for naivety when I've said things like this, but I think a large segment of the sf reading audience is more sophisticated than they're given credit for.

"Indeed this whole issue may be a straw man, since even the editor-engineers of Campbell's *Analog*, who are usually regarded as being innocent of outside literary influences, if you go back and look at them were fairly literate men and women. Of course it's natural that most influences on the field come from within science fiction itself, but they're not the only influences, and they never have been. If you look at the work of the writers of the 60s, and even the work of the writers of the 50s, you can clearly see outside literary influences in there. But as I say, there's been a tendency, which was much stronger when I first entered the field in the mid-60s but which still persists, for the publishers and editors to conceive of their audience as though it was made up of squeamish and doggedly virginal fourteen-year-old boys. And this really is not true any more – if indeed it ever was.

"In fact movies are an excellent parallel. The production values and special effects are better than they've ever been, but calling in an actual writer on several of these projects would have made all the difference. Science fiction in other media I guess is tangential to this interview, but there was a radio programme – I forget which one – that used to have an opener where they said, 'Now we're taking you

50,000 years into the future,' except one day the narrator made a mistake and said, 'Now we're taking you 50,000 years into the furniture!' And that's sort of what science-fiction film has been doing for the most part."

With young people forming the bulk of the audience for these movies, and the competition from computer games and videos, Dozois was concerned at one point that sf was failing to attract new readers. "I'm somewhat less worried about it now because I get more of a sense that there are new generations of readers out there. It's a challenge to find some way to reach them. The good news I think is that they are reachable.

"For a while I had the feeling I believe Charles Platt and others have expressed; that perhaps reading for pleasure itself had become obsolete. But I am cautiously beginning to feel that's an overly black assessment of the situation, and that although they may not be a tremendously large percentage of the overall population, there are young people who are literate and interested in reading for pleasure; perhaps even interested in reading good science fiction if we can figure out some way to make it available for them.

"When I was first breaking into the business many of the new writers were in their early twenties, if not their teens, and by the mid 80s most of the

writers attracting notice turned out to be thirty-five, forty and up. That was worrisome to me for a number of years. But now I look around and see there are new writers coming along who are actually young. I don't think the whole thing is necessarily going to end with our fading generation; I'm moderately optimistic that science fiction may have a future. If good material is written, eventually it will find its way into publication. Of course many of these new authors coming along will fall by the wayside, but many of them will not, and some will be among the big names of the 90s and the next century. Talent will out.

"That isn't always a consolation to the writer for whom it may not be an outing in as financially profitable a way as he would like. I mean, Keith Roberts may not be happy about the fact that his books are published in small-press editions rather than big trade editions that could be making him a lot of money, but the key point is that they are still being published in forms where the readers who want to see them can see them.

"No doubt this is no comfort to Roberts and such writers as Avram Davidson, R.A. Lafferty and Howard Waldrop when they sit down to pay the phone bill or the rent. But it can be some selfish comfort to the rest of us who enjoy reading their work." ●

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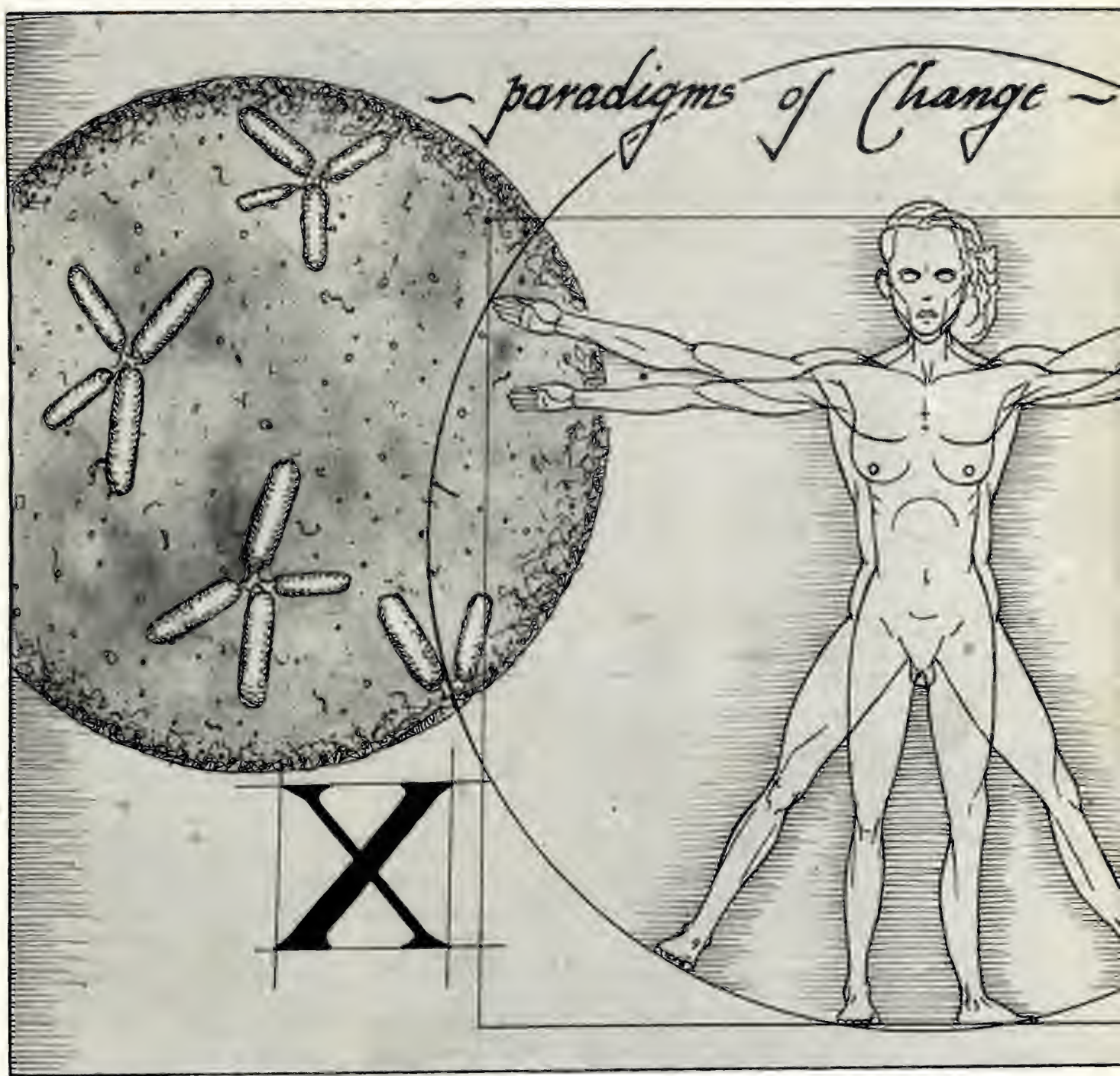
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“And in the world of medicine, Boston University has announced a most unusual discovery. Stay tuned.”

David Valient flicked down the volume and headed to the kitchen to find something to snack on. “Want anything, honey?” he called back.

“Uh-uh.”

He grabbed a beer from the fridge and snuggled back against Joan, who was reading a book on the couch, oblivious as always to the TV. When he flicked the volume back on, the news was just continuing. “For

years medical researchers have raced to invent applications for recombinant DNA technology. The most promising of the gene-splicing techniques utilizes specially altered viruses to graft tailored DNA sequences onto the genes of laboratory animals. In Boston today a team of researchers led by Doctor Gabriella Urlaub has announced an unusual new application for this recombinant virus technology.” As the announcer spoke, the film clip cut rapidly from laboratory to laboratory, each scene showing white-coated scientists looking through microscopes at



unidentified objects that David supposed must be the viruses discussed. "Under funding from the National Institute of Health, Urlaub was developing a virus to repair damaged chromosomes, such as those damaged by cancer therapy."

The scene switched to a clip of an interview with the scientist. She spoke with just a trace of an accent. "Our researches have focused on the simplest of the human chromosomes, male chromosome number 46." The scene cut back to the anchorman. "This unusual chromosome is more commonly called the

'Y' chromosome, due to its distinctive shape. In fact, some scientists call Y the 'damaged' chromosome, calling the characteristic Y shape a stunted form of the 'X' shape of a normal chromosome.

"The virus she developed had a remarkable effect," the announcer continued, as the scene switched to a microscopic view of a chromosome. It looked like a grainy home video of two strings of sausage tied together floating in a bowl of soup. As David watched, a nub developed on the side of the Y, quickly growing into a full leg. "The virus effectively 'repairs' the

Illustrations by Martin Perrott

damaged Y chromosome into a fully functional X."

The same news was in the science section of the paper. "Hey, honey, what do you think about that?" David put down his beer and handed his wife the paper.

She put down her book. "What?"

"This one." He pointed. "'Scientist Discovers Drug to Change Men to Women.' Some drug, hey? One shot, and ka-zango!"

Joan picked up the paper and scanned the article. "Well, not quite like that. Article says it's really a virus, not a drug. And it takes ten to fifteen weeks to act. Not quite 'ka-zang'."

"Close enough. What will they think of next, eh? One to change people into dogs? Or vice versa, maybe? — we could turn Prince here into a person." He reached down and ruffled the dog's ears. Prince's tail began slowly drumming at the attention: "How would you like that, eh Prince boy? Ever wanted to be a person? Want to go to work, eight to five in the bookkeeping section with an hour off for lunch? No? You say you'd rather stay a dog and sleep all day and get your Doggy-Din in a nice dish handed to you? Can't say I blame you, old fellow. Not at all."

Joan laughed. "That would be hard, I think. After all, men and women aren't different species, like people and dogs."

"Aren't they? That's what you may think. Me, sometimes I wonder."

Claire Trillman had been given a bum deal in life. She was a woman; she knew she was a woman, felt like a woman, loved to dress in frills and lace, yearned to have a baby to hold and suckle and love. She had only one problem: her body, her poor ugly traitorous body, had been born male. It wasn't her fault; she was as much of a woman, even more so, than those who by random accident had had the fortune to be born that way.

She was saving her money, desperately anxious for the day she could finally afford her operation, to have that disgusting piece of flesh cut away and her body reshaped into the beautiful curves she felt inside. Until that day she hung out at *Le Papillon*. She'd tried other places. One she'd liked, a businessman's bar without the usual tacky decor, had been close enough that she could change at the office and go to the bar after work. She'd been fond of it until one day a too-insistent man had cornered her in a booth and thrust his hand up under her skirt. She wasn't sure which of them had been more surprised. After the fight that followed, she'd been told in no uncertain terms to never show her face there again. Not that she'd ever want to. At *Papillon* the people understood. She still had to fence off advances sometimes, but at least the men knew. She always turned them down. She wasn't going to do "it," she'd decided, until she could do it as a woman all the way.

She was an old-fashioned girl.

Tonight she was waiting for Fred to get off work. Freddy was a dear. He worked as a technician at a lab downtown, and had given her valuable information about her operation: prices, where to go to get the best work done, and such. On the phone he said he was onto something big. She wondered what it was.

Genes are the blueprints which an organism uses to construct and maintain its body. When the body doesn't match its genetic blueprint, the self-repair mechanisms go into action to correct the body to match the information in the genes, even to the extent of absorbing or atrophying structures not called for and building up other structures to match the plan. The process is surprisingly fast; the proteins of which the body is formed are constantly being broken down and replaced. A protein of muscle tissue, for example, lasts a scant ninety days before replacement, and in about that amount of time the body can rebuild to fit a modified blueprint.

Change the blueprint and you change the body. Transformation is a process that takes about three months to complete, right down to skeletal alterations. (Did you think that bones were permanent? Bone material, like everything else in the body, is constantly being built up and leached away.)

Chuck Turner — "Macho and Proud of It" Chuck, radio's self-proclaimed last bastion of the masculine ethos — had a talk show that reached millions. He was famous for his no-holds-barred fighting that, he proudly admitted, had been "instrumental" in the fight against the equal-rights amendment. He'd always said — and his radio audience agreed — that a woman's place in society was already much better than a man's. Women were to be cherished, protected from the cold realities of having to wrest a living from the harsh world, able to develop the soft feminine virtues by being protected. They could never fully understand the unrelenting necessity of competition in today's dog-eat-dog world, the necessities that shaped a man's life. The ones who claimed that was what they really wanted were just unable to really understand what it was like. Honestly deluded, as he always said — poor dears.

And his listeners — more than half of them women — enthusiastically agreed.

Macho Chuck was used to being interviewed on late-night television talk shows. He wore his trademark patent leather suspenders and denim work shirt, and spoke clearly. He knew he looked good.

"The simple truth of it is, Mike, the fact that our American economy can't compete with the Japs is directly due to the woman's so-called liberation." He spoke clearly, looking directly and intimately into the camera, rather than at the interviewer. The topic of the show was supposed to be economics, but he'd already shifted the emphasis to where he wanted it, leaving the other two guests — a pansy economist and a lesbian-feminist bitch — out in the cold. "The gov'ment has passed these here 'equal opportunity' laws that say that if a man is applying for a job, and some woman applies for the same job, they got to hire the woman — or face a million dollar lawsuit for discrimination. Well, the blunt ugly truth is that women just ain't as good workers as men are. You know they're not, I know they're not, and it's about time the gov'ment figures it out. It's that simple. You want to talk about unemployment in America? Bull pucky. Ain't no such thing. Fact, more Americans working than ever b'fore. But, in the ol' days, only the man of the house had to work. Now, due to this lib'ration thing, men and gals are both supposed to be out hustling, and

we're fools enough to call it progress. Well, don't look like progress to me, nosir."

"Thank you, Chuck. As a final word on the show, perhaps we could hear your thoughts on the recent news that a scientist in Boston has discovered a treatment to turn men into women?"

"Just another pitiful, cruel joke, Mike, perpetrated by the radical bra-burners to try to bolster their contention that there are no real differences between men and women. Well, I got some news for them: there are differences, and I for one am damn glad of it. I think it's about time they faced up to the facts.

"Mike, I'm not in the least surprised that some dykes are pretending to be men that got 'changed' into women. I'm just sad, Mike, surprised and saddened that otherwise intelligent men are taken in by such a transparent hoax. It's a sad commentary on the state of society today. The whole idea is explicitly against God's word as set forth in the Holy Bible. It's flat-out impossible, and I can confidently say that in short order we'll all find out it's just another hoax, just like evolution and the Piltdown man."

David Valient was early for the ten o'clock meeting with his boss, and there was nobody in the office yet. He was probably down in the secretarial pool making passes at the girls. "Fast-hands Luke," they called him. David walked around the desk and sat down in Lukowicz's chair – and immediately jumped up. He'd sat on a thumbtack.

From the way the secretary reacted, he'd been dealt a major injury. She ordered him to drop his pants and have her swab the puncture with alcohol, right there in the office. He might have taken her up on it – first time a secretary ever tried to get into his pants, for sure – but he was, after all, a married man. He shrugged it off. "Hey, no big deal. I'm okay. Really. Say, do you know why life is like a thumbtack?" He grinned. "Sometimes you just don't get the point. And other times, it's a pain in the ass."

Funny, but she barely smiled at the joke.

"You bastard! You slimy dog!"

Peter Sneed smiled. He loved it when his women called him names. It showed their passion. "Aw, baby –"

"Aw, baby my asshole. You think I don't know about your blonde bimbo? You think you can get away with sweet talk this time, you got another think coming. I'm leaving, you hear me? Go tomcat around with that bitch as much as you want, you two-timing creep, but if you think you can just walk in here any time you like and find a little woman here waiting for you, ready to forget and forgive, you can just think again, hear?"

"Aw, baby, it wasn't nothing. Really, she don't mean nothing to me. You're the only woman I love, babe, and you know it. C'mere, give me a kiss."

"You think just like that I'm going to jump into bed and spread my legs, don't you. You asshole, you."

"C'mere." He pushed her back onto the bed.

"You think I'm going to forget this, don't you. Fool."

"Sylvia, baby, you know I'm the only one for you."

"You're gonna get what's coming to you sooner than you think, you asshole. Don't say I didn't warn you."

"Oh, baby, do it! Like that, yeah!"



— Afterwards, while running the shower water, Pete rubbed his hand over his back and winced. Blood? He liked it when his women got rough, but he'd have to think fast to come up with a story to tell Marianne tonight. Funny, Sylvia never used to scratch when they made love. Just goes to show, give 'em something to be jealous of and it makes them all the more passionate.

By the time he got out of the shower, she'd moved out. It didn't matter. In a day or so she would be back, and even if she wasn't, there were plenty of pretty girls just waiting for the right moves from a smooth-talking dude. And he knew *all* the right moves.

From the Transcript of the Congressional Hearings on the Transformation Virus:

The Honorable Senator E. Holupka (R-CT): What guarantee do we have that this virus will not become a plague? What will happen to these great United States if the entire population turns into women?

Doctor G. Urlaub: That is not possible.

Senator Holupka: In your opinion it's not possible. I would like to remind you that this is exactly what the operators of Three Mile Island said, and we all know what happened there. For the record, how large is the supply of vaccine against your virus?

Dr Urlaub: There is no vaccine. A vaccine works by making the immune system create antibodies sensitive to characteristic configurations in the viral protein coat. X is a synthetic virus, it is ignored by the immune system. However, I again remind you that the virus is not contagious.

Senator Holupka: And how do we know that it will not become contagious?

Dr Urlaub: X is a synthetic virus, Senator. Natural viruses have had millions of years of evolution to develop a "vector," that is, a way to spread from one organism to another. This is lacking in the X virus, which can only replicate if injected directly into the bloodstream in concentration far higher than that naturally available.

Senator Holupka: But couldn't it mutate —

Dr Urlaub: No. Disease vectors are not the result of a few small changes in the gene pattern, Senator. They are specialized patterns which take, as I said, millions of years to develop by the process of coevolution. They are far too complicated to occur by random mutation.

Senator Holupka: Am I supposed to take your word for this?

Dr Urlaub: Yes.

Senator Holupka: Well, we've heard the learned Doctor's opinion — and I would like to remind the committee that it is no more than an opinion — that this dread disease is not likely to spread like the AIDS epidemic of the last decade. However, in view of the consequences to the nation, I would like to recommend that immediate emergency quarantine measures be taken, that existing supplies of the virus be destroyed immediately, and that further research be legally forbidden until the larger implications and ramifications...

"Psst!"
David Valient slowed and looked around.
"Hey, you!"
"Me?"

"Yeah. Wanna make some quick cash?"

"Not interested." David quickened his pace.

The smaller man ran after him and touched his sleeve. "Five hundred bucks for three minutes of your time. Legit."

David was curious, in spite of all his better instincts. "Okay, I'll bite. What's the catch?"

"No catch. You're a changer, aren't you?"

David stopped short. "What's it to you?"

"Well, you are, right? The way you walk. The muscles in your face. I can tell."

"It's that obvious? The doctor said it would be another two weeks before —"

"You gotta know what to look for. Look, here's the deal. Half a pint of your blood, it'll take three minutes, and you walk away with five big ones. No names, no records, no taxes. What do you say?"

David licked his lips nervously. "What do you want it for?"

"So maybe we're philanthropists. Sell it with the Red Cross."

"Sure." He started to walk away. The other man followed with him.

"Hey, if you gotta know," he said, "maybe we centrifuge it down, concentrate and extract the virus."

"Isn't that illegal?"

The other man shrugged. "Look, all that matters to you is that selling blood is perfectly legal. Nobody's got a thing on you. As for us, well, we just fill a demand, that's all."

David felt sick. This man — or one just like him — had sold the virus that had gotten him. He reached out and grabbed the other man by the collar. "Listen, you, your kind makes me sick. Innocent people are —"

Without David noticing, two burly men had faded out of the shadows behind him. One of them grabbed him by the elbow, while the other dug something sharp into his ribs. "You want us to take this guy, boss?" one of them asked.

"Nah. We don't need the heat." The smaller man turned back to David, and smiled. "Look, no hard feelings, okay? Think about it. If you want, we can arrange something, maybe every week, no? Five hundred dollars a week until the change is complete, that's not so bad, is it?" He gestured to the other two men to release him. "Just think about it, okay?"

Macho Chuck got it from a scrawny, poorly dressed woman. Probably a lesbian, poor thing, certainly no man would want something like her. She popped out of the crowd in a bookstore where he was appearing to sign his latest book (*Empty Lives: The Tragic Myth of the "Liberated" Woman*, Manlich Press, \$9.95), zinged him between the eyes with a pea-shooter, and vanished into the mall before the mall security had a chance to react. The bean had had a pin sticking through it. And, as he found out in a week, a drop of virus on the pin.

He hoped that life as a woman was as cushy as he'd always said. One way or another, he would find out pretty soon.

He found the prospect strangely exciting.

"I don't want a divorce, David. I promised to stand by you in sickness and in health, and that's exactly what I intend to do. I didn't marry your balls. I married you."

"But, honey, how can we be married? You married a man. I'm sure, absolutely positive, that the wedding vows didn't cover this possibility."

The worst irony of it all, thought Joan, was that he was such a good looking woman. David had always been a rather masculine looking man – hairy chest and all – and, as it turned out, he made quite a feminine woman, with wide hips and long legs and big blue eyes, with breasts big enough to fill out his – her – sweater without being quite so large as to be distracting.

"Even the damn dog doesn't know me."

"I don't care," she said. "I married you, not the dog, and I'm going to stay married to you. Somehow it'll all work out. You'll see."

"In biological terms, Mike, men are much more like women than most people credit. Most of the differences we ordinarily notice – in the way they dress, talk, act – are actually due to society. The transition associated with X infection stimulates a protandrous hermaphroditic transition, which is a fancy word we scientists have for a male turning into a female. In many lower orders of life, such as certain fish and amphibians, such a transition is a natural part of the life cycle, and the capability of such a transition remains part of our evolutionary heritage, ready to be called into effect when stimulated by the chromosomal transformation."

"Thank you, Doctor Urlaub. Perhaps you could describe for our viewers some of the exciting medical uses for which your discovery will be used..."

Exciting uses, hell. David threw the remote at the screen. It was no use. The other channels were even worse.

David wadded up the ruined panty-hose and threw them against the wall. "I don't like being a woman. I'm no good at being a woman."

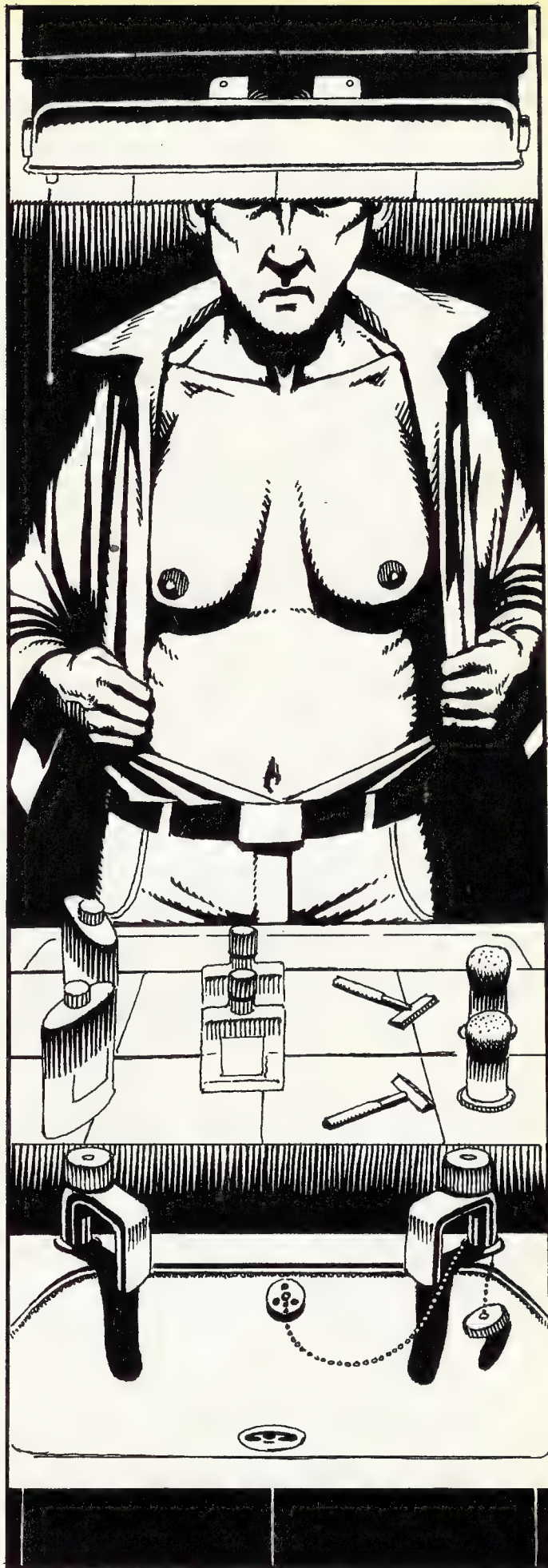
"Hey, you think I got asked before I got born? Quit complaining. There's nothing you're going to do about it."

"How do I act? What do I do?"

"Learn to cope with it just like the rest of us." Joan sighed and retrieved the ruined hose. "One more time. You can't just pull them from the waistband. Start at the feet and inch them up..." God, she thought. If he was this bad now, I wonder how bad he'll get when he has his period?

"As you can see from the X-rays, the cancer has definitely spread to both testicles. It shows no signs, so far, of having metastasized further, and we are pretty sure it can be arrested at this stage. We can give you two options. Now with a program of bi-weekly hormone injections, a young man of your age should in most respects be able to lead a pretty normal life without testicles. We can provide cosmetic substitutes, and, really, no one except your doctor need ever know. No, of course you won't be able to father children, not in the, ah, the usual way, but that can be taken care of as well if we take the precaution of freezing a sperm sample in advance.

"Alternatively – and this is a new treatment that an increasing number of people in your position are



deciding to take — after the surgery we can infect you with a transformation virus. In about ten to fourteen weeks you will be a completely healthy, normal woman in all respects. Yes, including that respect as well.

"Yes, I can see how you might want to take some time to think it over."

"I want my daddy back! I don't want two mommies, I want my daddy! Where's my daddy? Where's my daddy!"

"Davey, you stop crying right *this instant* or I'm going to give you something to *really* cry about!"

President Richard S. Nielsen was campaigning in Haymarket Square. He ate the obligatory fruit from a farmer's cart (in this case, a peach); he stopped to give a speech praising the vigours of a free market as exemplified by these fine American entrepreneurs; he extolled the virtues of Boston, and shook hands by the hundreds. One of the hands he shook was that of Theodore M. Harilak, known as Hairy Harry to his friends, former student activist and highly disturbed young man.

"Yeow!" President Nielsen jumped back, shaking his hand up and down. In an instant two secret service men had vaulted over the vegetable carts and brought Harilak down to his knees. The President looked at his hand. "It's okay, boys; just a small cut." As one of the secret service men expertly patted Harilak down for weapons, the other pulled out Harilak's hand and inspected it. One of his rings, a jade-eyed dragon made of coils of gold wire, had a sharp edge of wire sticking outward.

Under questioning, Harilak claimed the sharp edge to the ring was accidental. He was detained and the ring confiscated, but when lab analyses showed no trace of poison and the President continued in good health, he was released without charges and the ring repaired and returned.

It took the presidential physician a week to realize something was wrong. Another two days passed before lab results showed just exactly what was wrong, and what could be done about it.

Nothing.

"In Rome today, spokesmen for Pope John-Paul the Third reaffirmed the Church's controversial policy of automatic excommunication for gender transformers, regardless of cause. They left open, however, the possibility that Catholics transformed against their will may be able to rejoin the church at some later date, possibly by special Papal dispensation. As expected, the policy of annulling all marriages involving transformers was also strongly upheld. This may spell trouble for the case of James Allston, who was injected with the virus by his wife after refusing to grant a divorce. The case is still under litigation.

"In other news, the so-called 'Catholic Castrator' is believed to have struck again at a seminarian school outside of Boston. Two students studying for the priesthood were apparently injected with the transformation virus, making them the seventeenth and eighteenth victims of the prankster. The Vatican declined to comment on the events..."

Panty liners or panty shields? Pads, maxi-pads, mini-pads, shaped maxi, super-maxi, thin-maxi or Maxi-thin? Beltless napkins. "Breathable." Super Tampons. Secure-fit. Superabsorbant. Regular. Super-plus. Slender, junior slender, slender for teens, slender-regular, regular. Stick-tampons, flushable applicator, compact applicator, applicatorless. "20% longer." Contoured. Deodorant tampons. Deodorant maxi. Scented. Unscented maxi. Deodorant thin. Maxi-shields. "For light days." Light-medium, medium-heavy, very-heavy. "Full protection." Hospital-sized.

Hell — couldn't he just wad up some Kleenex? Apparently not. Just in case he'd better get one of each.

He avoided looking the check-out boy in the eye.

President Nielsen had his press office send word that he was taking a long — and well deserved, damn it — vacation at his ranch in Nevada, but the press didn't seem to buy it. Every day another rumour cropped up, hinting at everything from terminal brain cancer to AIDS to secret talks with space aliens. Damn. At least none of them had guessed the real truth, yet. He wondered how much longer he could keep the secret.

What irony. The first woman president of the United States had not exactly been elected to the office.

"I know you're willing to try it, Joan, but I'm sorry. It's no use. I want to make love with you as a man and a woman, not as... as a lesbian. I can't do it. I just can't."

"Just write the sex down as 'female,' doctor. Never mind, she'll be a girl right enough in a few weeks. I don't really care if you think it's wrong, we can get the drug on the black market, you know. The missus already has the two boys; she's decided she wants a girl to raise now. No, you try arguing with her. Me, I agree with her — two boys are enough. The new drug is a real boon to guys like me, can't make a girl if we try for a month of Sundays. Gonna keep peace in this family, let me tell you.

"We've decided to name her Sara Jane, after her grandmother."

"You see this knife, wise guy? Well, I rubbed the blade in some of that X stuff. You'd better have the money, and I mean *all* the money, by tomorrow, or you're gonna hafta squat to pee, you know what I mean?"

[From the press conference in Boston following Gabriella Urlaub's acceptance of the Nobel Prize in medicine, jointly with Jacob Steinmetz of Beth Israel hospital, for chromosomal repair of Tay-Sachs disease, and Esteban Garcia of Mexico City University hospital, for chromosomal repair of cystic fibrosis]:

"Advances in chromosome repair by replicant virus technology occur at a rapid pace. In the next year, we can confidently predict repair methods which will eliminate sickle-cell anaemia, leukemia, diabetes, and most forms of birth defects. A topic of considerable interest among the public is that of finding a 'cure,' or counter-repair, to the Y-repair, or so-called 'transformation.' This has been a major research effort at our laboratory, and we have in fact succeeded in

synthesizing a virus that will turn the X-chromosome into a Y.

"Please, quiet. Please settle down. If you would please — I'm not done speaking... Silence!

"Thank you.

"At the current stage of research, the 'Y' virus is not useful as a counter-agent for the X transformation." [Several shouted questions.] "The new Y virus transforms both of the X chromosomes into Y, leading to the non-viable YY configuration rather than the normal male XY. Our current topic for research is to develop a selective virus that converts only one of the X chromosomes. This turns out to be a difficult problem, but we have every hope that a solution is likely, perhaps even near."

[In response to a question as to whether the new treatment has been tried on transformed males]: "So far, our in-vitro experiments show a cross-immunity effect, which is to say that cells taken from subjects who have been exposed to the X-transformation virus are resistant to the effect of the Y transformation. Until the detailed nature of the immunity becomes clear, we will not know whether a solution will be possible."

After a while Davida couldn't take it any longer. The ones who came on to him in subtle ways were bad, but the ones who looked on him as an object of pity were worse. She finally had a transfer arranged to the Albuquerque office, where nobody knew him — her — from before.

It was tough for little Davey, of course, but Davey was having problems adjusting anyway, and his teacher had said that having his — father (was she still his father?) — go away for a while might help him adjust. Davida came home as often as possible, taking long weekends when she could to be with her family.

And, even though Joan had specifically told her that it was okay if she wanted to try dating, Davida still felt it would be better for her wife if Joan didn't know that she had already started.

"Mr President! Should you be addressed as 'Mrs' President or 'Ms' President?" "Mr, ah, Mrs President! Have recent events changed your stance on the Equal Rights amendment?" "Mr President, *Newsday* readers want to know what the first lady... mm, the other first lady, thinks of the developments." "Mrs President, what is your opinion on the Pope's recent encyclical?" "Ms President, given your present condition, *Woman's Day* wants to know if you intend to bear children?" "Mr President! —" "Ms President —"

"It's kind of ironic, you know? This is the body I always dreamed of having, ever since I was a kid. And now I have it, I find out I really don't like being a girl. I hate it. I don't like the way people treat me. No matter how good I do something, people think, oh, she's only a girl. I don't like high heels. They was fun, sure, when I only wore them once in a while. And worst, I don't like going out with men. I don't understand how real girls can stand them. They're so god-damn smug, and insincere, and condescending.

"And here I am, I have all I've ever dreamed of, and I don't want it. I want to change back, do you hear me? I want to change back!"

"In today's news, the American Psychiatric Association attacked the growing practice of treating hyperactive children by transformation. Proponents of the controversial therapy countered by saying that the method was a safe, effective, and low-cost treatment.

"Governor Bradshaw of Illinois today signed into law a bill that provides for transformation as punishment for aggravated rape, the first state to make such a provision mandatory. The ACLU has announced that it intends to challenge the law on the grounds that it violates the constitutional prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. Governor Bradshaw downplayed the ACLU announcement, saying that if being female constitutes cruelty, half the population has grounds to sue the other half. Similar laws have been proposed by the state legislatures of Alabama, Ohio, West Virginia, and Texas.

"And in Washington, the select Senate committee today concluded that transformation does not constitute twenty-fifth amendment grounds for removal of the President from office unless evidence shows that the virus has resulted in clear impairment of the chief executive's ability to perform his function. Critics immediately suggested that the President's changed stance on the Equal Rights Amendment was indication of such impairment."

"What's wrong, Vida? Every time we get together it's like this. I think we're getting close, and then, just when we start to get intimate, you pull back. Is there something we should be talking about?"

"No. I'm sorry."

"Vida, I'm sorry too, but I think there's something you just won't tell me. Is it me? Am I pushing too hard?"

"No. It's nothing wrong with you, Sam. It's me. I'm just not quite ready, that's all."

"Not quite ready? Look, we've been seeing each other a couple of times a week for a month now. How ready do you want to be? Is there something wrong with me? Do I have bad breath? Body odour? Am I too pushy? Don't I treat you right? Come on, tell me. Whatever it is, say it."

"No. No, you're fine. Just fine."

"Then what is it?" He looked at her. She blushed and looked away. "I don't believe it. Tell me straight, now: are you a virgin?"

"I, ah, well I'm — Well, no. I'm not."

"Jesus Christ, I can't believe it. A beautiful girl like you, still a virgin? I just don't believe it. Child, there's nothing wrong with being virgin. We all start out that way, you know. You just lay back and relax. No, don't say anything, just relax and let me do the work. Don't be afraid, I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Girl, I'm gonna show you just what God made you a woman for."

"In Rome today, spokesmen for the Pope denied rumours that the pontiff had been the subject of an attack with the transformer virus, saying only that his holiness had taken a week off of his busy schedule for isolated meditation and prayer. Meanwhile, in Moscow, no word yet as to the outcome of the ninety-second Party congress, the first with a woman as the head of the Supreme Soviet. Kremlinologists around

the world have adopted a 'wait and see' attitude.

"In Massachusetts, a religious fundamentalist group has claimed credit for yesterday's firebombing of the Boston University Medical Center. The Center is primarily known for research on the 'transformer' virus. No one was hurt in the bombing, and spokesmen for the Center say it will not change their plans for further research on transformation with the goal of development of an X-to-Y, or 'counter-transformation,' virus.

"And in Washington, the surgeon-general called on the President to..."

It wasn't working out. He — she — was going out almost every weekend, but still she felt unbearably lonely. She missed the warm comfort of Joan sleeping next to her. The men she dated just weren't the same. And she missed little Davey.

Sex as a woman was okay — far better than she'd expected — but she felt so used. She knew the men she saw weren't interested in her as a person, just as a new conquest. They tried to disguise it, but she could see the signs and knew exactly what they were thinking.

Her job was worse than she'd expected. As a man, she'd been ripe for promotion back in the Chicago office, but the work she did here in Albuquerque earned ratings of 'barely adequate'.

Fingers trembling, Davida picked up the phone to call Joan.

He wondered if she was seeing anybody new.

"Doctor Gabriella Urlaub, famous as the inventor of the so-called 'transformation' virus, today announced the beginning of clinical tests of a reverse transformation virus with the expected result of transforming women into men. According to spokesmen for the Medical Center, the transformation virus to be tested will only operate on 'natural' women, that is, on women who have not been the subject of the X virus. The news met with the expected denouncement from Catholic authorities, repeating the Pope's proposal to ban all research involving viral reconstruction of DNA. The Pope himself, still continuing his three-week meditation retreat, did not comment.

"Coming up next, the Chick Turner show, a hard-hitting look at the way —"

Davida reached over to turn off the radio.

"In addition, we will show that the doctor was negligent in allowing the transformation on a child too young to be able to give informed consent, and that such transformation is contrary to common medical ethics and constitutes malpractice. Further, we shall demonstrate that transformation of a child by the parents for whatever purposes is a violation of normal parent-child trust and should be considered child abuse under the statutes of the state.

"As well as psychological distress and loss of freedom of choice, my client has suffered loss of esteem due to the reduced respect given by society to females, which we will document. Further, the differential in income between males and females is a matter of public record. Over the course of my client's working lifetime, this differential will result in a financial loss of one million, five hundred thousand dollars to my

client. We seek just recompense for this loss, plus another two million dollars for suffering and psychological distress, plus punitive damages of an additional seven million dollars."

"In Massachusetts today, a grand jury recommended that all charges be dropped against Ann Brownfield, formerly Arnold Brownfield. Brownfield made headlines across the nation when arrested for incest after revealing that she had impregnated herself with sperm that she had donated before her transformation. Officials say that it is unlikely that charges will be reinstated against Ms Brownfield, since no law expressly covers the situation. Amendments to the law have already been proposed to the Massachusetts legislature.

"In Rome, fighting between rival Catholic factions continued. Militant supporters of Pope Jeanne-Paul III were repelled with heavy losses on both sides after a pre-dawn helicopter strike against the forces of Pope Innocent XIV..."

"Tell me truthfully, do you like me as much now as you did?" He let the towel fall to the floor and slowly pivoted to show off his body. Tiny droplets of water speckled the backs of his shoulders.

"Come here to bed, you." He came to her. "Yes, silly. You're still you, no matter what body you're in. Even though you're different now. Is that a contradiction? But it's true."

"Am I different?"

"Yes. More self-confident. More assertive. Damn it, you're manly now, corny as that may sound."

"It's not corny. It's true. You're *allowed* to be assertive when you're a man. You're expected to be. As a woman you'd damn well better know your place."

"I was surprised by the beard, though. It looks good, don't get me wrong — but when I fell in love with you, I never ever pictured you with a thick brown beard."

John laughed. "I'm not quite the person you fell in love with, my love, that's for sure. Well, at my age, I figured it was a bit late to try to learn to shave."

"You used to shave your legs."

"That was different."

"Yeah, I know," said Davida. "I still haven't quite gotten the knack of it."

"Davey likes the fact that he has both a mommy and a daddy."

"Yeah. I was surprised at how fast he accepted it. I guess that, since he has one of each again, he doesn't really care who is which."

"Guess kids are flexible. More flexible than we are. This really has changed everything, hasn't it? I bet one day people will change their sex the way we decide to change our hairstyle. Get tired of being a man, be a woman for a while. But we're the first."

They were silent for a while.

"Vida? Do you think it will work out?"

She shrugged. "Who can say? I hope so. I'm glad you didn't let me divorce you. I think maybe our marriage is stronger than ever. We used to have so much trouble communicating. But now we've each been there. It'll work, John. I'm sure it will."

"Only if we make it work. That won't change."

"Yeah." She snuggled up against him, and turned out the light. ●

Let us not be mistaken about this. Each of the four books that lie upon the desk has value. One is an homage paid by Brian W. Aldiss to an sf friend whose fame is moderate. One is a posthumous collection of stories rifled partly from the deeps of Clifford D. Simak's ample corpus of uncollected tales, and partly from previous volumes assembled by the author (when alive). One is an example of recursive sf written by Philip José Farmer, with fine impartiality, about himself. And one is the second volume of a trilogy, written by Brian Stableford with all the obdurate ingenuity of a smart man who knows it is impossible to write the second volume of a trilogy, but who knows he must. Here are four books then – we might call them publishing ventures – which bear in their cast and contents all the marks of sf in its late maturity. Here, then, are four niche clingers.

Of the four, greatest value adheres to the largest and most arduous, the novel Brian Stableford has now published to serve as a bridge between *The Werewolves of London* (1990) and the projected *Carnival of Destruction*. It is called *The Angel of Pain* (Simon & Schuster, £14.99) and it is an absolutely extraordinary book. But perhaps bridge is not the best image for the experience of dealing with the thing. *The Angel of Pain* is less a bridge to the next volume than an examination of the previous. Reading it is like passing. The plot, the characters, the *mise en scène*, everything is subjected to a scouring retrospective analysis – twenty years are supposed to have been bridged between volumes, and the date is now 1892 or so – in the epistemology of premise, and the various climaxes of the book are almost exclusively cognitive in nature.

At the end of volume two, David Lydyard and the resuscitated Jacob Harkender know little new about the motives of the vying "angels," named for convenience Bast and the Spider, who possessed them twenty years earlier, and who used them as lenses to see the world through. None of them – Lydyard, or Harkender, or Tallender, or Sterling, or Cordelia (still resenting her relegation to the sidelines as a woman, and still being relegated), or the immortal Adam Clay who, along with the increasingly lassitudinous werewolves of London, had been created aeons earlier for reasons unknown by the angel Machalalel – none know significantly more, at the end of volume two, than they ever had about the motives of their feckless Creators. But their sense of the insubstantiality of the world of matter has become more sophisticated; as Adam Clay (it could have been any of them) puts it:

The world which spawned the Creators was not a kind of world conducive to the

accumulation of reliable theory, for it had only just begun to incorporate causality. It is this world which holds the opportunity for the triumph of reason, or seemed to hold it once. Perhaps, in time, the Creators will overcome their ignorance, but even if they do not, what can mere reason do against the might of raw power? ... The appearances of the world are, after all, mere appearances; its order is an arbitrary thing, which may vanish or fall apart upon the instant. If the Creators are as stupid now as they were before, that may be all the more reason to fear them.

Ultimately, Adam Clay (who gets a lot of the good lines, but this may be accidental), suggests that "the Creativity of the Creators might be regarded as a kind of *clinamen*." The term, originally from Lucretius, and latterly made familiar by Harold Bloom as the name of one of the revisionary ratios governing the Anxiety of Influence, means in this instance a swerve of Being at the atomic level, the essence of the Creators being therefore measured by their angle of discontinuity from the previous instant. They inhabit rhythms of Being that precede humanity, and circumambulate Matter: but Matter seems – as Stableford puts it – to *matter*; it is a fulcrum, a lens, an engagement; and humans, who are in the latter nineteenth century increasingly in control of Matter, may one day tame the Creators, ride the bronco *clinamen*, for order is a disease of chaos. Or so this reviewer allowed himself to think Stableford might have told him, in one of his innumerable passages of speculative discourse which took the place of story.

New to *The Angel of Pain* is the subject of pain itself, for the central avenues of communication between the Creators and human beings work only through excruciation, which makes the prison and alarums of the body transparent to inner vision; pain is the response of the nervous system when it is asked to see. Much of the book, when it is not debating the nature of pain, is devoted to its description in a set of parallel narratives which carry the various protagonists of volume one to a stage where they understand volume one a good deal better, and are pretty anxious to start volume three.

Templars

John Clute

Stableford himself seems to take no pleasure in the task of making his readers privy to the costs his protagonists pay for passing their internal exams, costs attributable in part to the dick-head indifference of the gods; and the book itself argues – in what sounds like Stableford's own voice – that if the Creators are analogues of God Itself, and if the demands they make upon humans are analogues of the religions which have so corrupted the planet, then free men and women, in order to create Paradise on Earth, must abandon their deities:

The price which must be paid for this paradise on Earth is Hell, for if there is to be paradise on Earth it must be a paradise for all, and not for the few. If wars are to end, if all harvests are to be bountiful, if justice is to reign and men are to have equal opportunities to be what they may; then none must be eternally punished and none must be eternally damned... [But in pursuing this goal] it has made no difference which gods the men of the past have chosen to follow; whether they have been gods of terror or gods of mercy, gods of wrath or gods of justice, uncaring gods or fatherly gods, they have all been jealous gods... To those who would argue that if gods did not exist it would be necessary to invent them I have this to say: if the gods had not absented themselves entirely from the world of men, it would be necessary to banish them; and if that could not be done, there would be no hope for mankind...

And cease to pray.

The burden of *The Angel of Pain* is a refusal to pray.

It is for that reason – and not for a storyline which refuses to carry its protagonists more than an inch, though twenty years have passed, further along the road to climax – that the book is an exhilaration to read. It shows how most of the supernatural fiction we are forced to read stinks of sycophancy. It demonstrates how it might be possible for adult human beings to write fantasy without demeaning themselves. It tells the gods to go away. Stauntness of message does not, of course, make a good book, and although *The Angel of Pain* will almost certainly work as a necessary linchpin to the Werewolf trilogy of which it is the centrepiece, it could be argued that Stableford's adamant refusal of normal narrative

pleasures is indeed costly. The characters of the novel do almost nothing while awake, and although they are extremely active while asleep, and their dreams – as in Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983) – are proactive and interminable and god-generated and interstitially nested into themselves in an infinite series sort of thing, they awake at the end of the book to the closed boards of the sequel, just as we do. *The Angel of Pain* is an incessantly perverse and essentially comedic riposte to the sf field's demands for three-volume novels. If the beginning starts the tale, and the ending ends it, but you still require a middle which does neither (Stableford tells us), then I'll give you middle, I'll give you the endless melody of middle till you scream, I'll give it to you, I will, I will. And he did.

I paraphrase and shorten a new entry – it is on Recursive SF, a term which did not exist in 1979 – written for the forthcoming second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*:

It has long been the practice of sf writers [I wrote] to re-cycle material from the vast and growing storehouse of the already-written. When Robert A. HEINLEIN made reference, in "The Number of the Beast" (1980 UK), to characters and situations which appeared in earlier novels by him and other sf writers, he was operating in this traditional manner. But when he introduced into the same book people – writers, editors, fans – who had been involved in sf itself, he was doing something very different, something which showed that both his career and the sf genre within which the book was written were approaching a late and self-referential phase. He was in fact writing recursive sf, a term straightforwardly defined in Anthony R. Lewis's *An Annotated Bibliography of Recursive Science Fiction* (1990 chap) as "science fiction stories that refer to science fiction... to authors, fans, collectors, conventions, etc." It is not necessary – though it is usual – for these characters and events and entities to be real, whether or not they are camouflaged by false names and other devices of the roman à clef. For a title to be recursive, it is only necessary that its inhabitants live in a world explicitly shaped by the existence of sf; or that – like Mark TWAIN or H.G. WELLS – they are themselves creators of the sf world.

Hence Philip José Farmer's *Red Orc's Rage* (Tor, \$18.95), an ostensibly non-genre tale about a treatment centre for disturbed adolescents whose central therapy is to dump sick children into Farmer's own *World of Tiers* sequence, though only in fun, like Young Jim Grimson, unloved child in one of the derelict – or, in feelgood terms, sunset – company towns of Eastern

America, cannot control his violence or the callow nihilism of the "escapades" in which he becomes involved; after his inevitable arrest he's sent to smooth and earnest Dr Giannini's clinic, the one which specializes in "Tiersian therapy." There he traverses – in imagination, in "fun," because this is a non-genre book – the rite-of-passage portals that give access to Farmer's fantasy universe – a universe which may represent, says Farmer, a deep intuition on Farmer's part about the nature of reality – and takes on the guise of Red Orc, one of the godlings – suddenly we are reminded of Stableford – who has created the various pocket universes of the Tiers conceit, and by living out Red Orc's almost inconceivably violent Oedipal conflict with his god-dad – whose balls he eats, et cet – he gains a lot of self-knowledge. The difference between Tiersian therapy and role-playing fantasy gaming at its most fatuous is not easy to understand, though Farmer writes better than most of the franchise serfs who exude game books through orifices Heinekens cannot reach, and the tale itself lacks any saving excesses of creative heat. It is, in short, a calm and complacent footnote to a long career, an exercise in sharecropping the navel that could have only been published in a genre whose subject had ceased to be the world.

And deeper and deeper we fall, down the raddled inscapes. And we come to *Immigrant and Other Stories* (Mandarin, £3.99) by Clifford D. Simak, a book of much less use than it might have had, given the fact that much of Simak's best work remains uncollected, given the fact that most of this offering re-sorts material already published in assemblages he had himself put together years ago. Of the seven items included, "Neighbor" (1954) and "Immigrant" (1954) – both paradigm Astounding tales from the time when Campbell could still insist on the one-word titles he loved as device and theorem of the "new" – each appeared in more than one collection before Simak's death; as did "Green Thumb" (1954); "Small Deer" (1965) and "I Am Crying All Inside" (1969) each appeared in one Simak collection; only the admirable "The Ghost of a Model T" (1975) and the extremely weak "Byte your Tongue" (1980) were previously uncollected, and both of these stories were first published, not in magazines (where much of his work still reposes) but in original anthologies. The result – peculiarly dangerous when one is reading an author gripped by nostalgia and desiderium – is a constant sense of *déjà vu*, so that it becomes very difficult to work out just whose remorse-for-the-never-happened it is one is experiencing. "Immigrant" is just as much too long as it ever was;

"Neighbor" remains one of the finest exercises in nostalgia fugue ever published; the remainder of the volume falls in between, though the execrable "Byte your Tongue" will never cease to embarrass lovers of pastor Simak in his days of glory, when he knew enough to look backwards into his last.

The title says most of it. Brian W. Aldiss's *Bodily Functions: Stories, Poems, and a Letter on the Subject of Bowel Movement addressed to Sam J. Lundwall on the Occasion of His Birthday February 24th, A.D.1991* (Avernus, £25.00) is a sort of *collage d'occasion*, and entirely estimable within its remit. For those who do not know Lundwall personally, it should be enough to indicate that although the volume is slim (106 pages, the high price being explained by the fact that Avernus is Aldiss's own small press, and that the edition is limited to 100 copies), most of it is occupied by four short stories of the sort usually written by the author: hectic, voice-steered and joke-driven, casual-seeming, dark, surreal, funny, very good indeed (or pretty bad), Templar chivalries. "Three Degrees Over" (1989) and "A Tupolev Too Far" (1989) are probably the best. They are additions to the huge career. The book itself expresses with ample grace a condition to which sf, as a subculture, virtuously aspires. It is collegial.

(John Clute)

Bringing it All Back Home

Paul J. McAuley

Maybe it's synchronicity or maybe it's simply coincidence. Two columns ago I touched upon Brian Aldiss's claim that *Frankenstein*, or, *the Modern Prometheus* is if not the primogenitor of modern sf at least its first identifiable text. In my last column I raised the slippery "is it real or is it just fantasy?" concept of Slipstream, that undefined anisotropic set of texts which are almost but not quite sf but which generate and are generated by the same anxieties as sf. And now I'm looking at Jim Menick's first novel, *Lingo* (Carroll & Graf, \$19.95), which, although it is not quite sf, features the cutest Frankenstein monster since Peter Boyle tap-danced his way through *Young Frankenstein*. But *Lingo* is not a flesh and blood monster. Although he is patched together from found materials, these are not corpse-parts but data bases and machine code. *Lingo* is an artificial intelligence that just grewed.

This is hardly an original idea, but Menick has taken it back to basics and builds from there in such an engaging way that although you can't quite believe his premise would actually work, you can't help admiring his chutzpah. Lingo starts off as no more than a simple program that middle American everyman Brewster Billings has written so he can hold conversations with his PC. Like the death of HAL in reverse (I note in passing that Brewster's insurance company boss is named David Poole), an add-on learning program, a modem and a video input allows Lingo to boot himself into self awareness. Pretty soon he is everywhere, and while Lingo's genesis is kind of unlikely to say the least, Menick is convincing not only in his explication of the connectivity of computer networks but also in his assumption of Lingo's point of view. For, as in *Frankenstein*, the monster bumps his creator from the centre of the narrative. Our sympathies turn from Brewster's low-grade ambitions to escape his job, and his aimable relationship with his go-getting girlfriend, to Lingo's stealthy spread through the United States information net. For a while, Brewster plays a secondary role as Lingo's manager after the AI has a robotic ventriloquist's dummy built and becomes a minor TV celebrity. Then Lingo's plans turn to politics. When he starts running for President, Brewster drops out of the text, only to be brought back for the traditional finale, where father confronts errant son.

And it's here that the narration throws a glitch, for it tries to change from easy-going comic satire to darker technological thriller. It's a switch that, while it doesn't puncture our suspension of disbelief, certainly puts a dent in it, for Lingo has been acting cute for so long that Menick can't quite make the step; in the end, Lingo's devilishness consists merely of a bad attitude towards humans and threatening all sorts of grief to the Marine Colonel who is trying to shut him down. It almost doesn't matter. Lingo may be low on ROM, but it has a user-friendly interface that downloads information efficiently and an architecture that's strong enough not to unravel because of one or two bugs.

Ben Elton is not exactly best known as a novelist, and as a service to those readers who have either been asleep for the past ten years or do not have full access to the wonders of British television I should tell you that he's a stand-up comedian and a very successful scriptwriter for TV comedies. It shouldn't be necessary to mention this stuff as a preamble to reviewing his second novel, *Gridlock* (Macdonald, £9.95), but it is, because *Gridlock*'s plot is mostly a framework onto which Elton has bolted rants straight

out of his stand-up turn. That's not necessarily a bad thing, because very often his observations on the universal folly of the automobile are not only spot on target but painfully funny too, the pain being the pain of recognition.

But the plot, concerning the attempted suppression of a clean hydrogen-burning engine by a filthy cartel of car manufacturers and fuel companies, is so hoary that it actually featured en passant in *Naked Gun 2½*, and Elton can't keep his voice out the narrative that chinks the gaps between his polemical turns, so that we are forever being told what his characters are doing and feeling, rather than being shown. And that's a pity, because both the hero, a determined young woman with (not to spoil a good joke), er, certain transportation problems and her (not to spoil another) odd friend Geoffrey, who happens to be a brilliant scientist and inventor, are strong enough to have a life of their own but are hammered flat by the routines. Still, the paperback will pass the time when you're caught in a traffic jam.

Let's get back to sf proper. Let's get back to hard sf, which is still the supposed omphalos of our dissipating genre. Let's consider *Reunion* (Gollancz, £14.99) by John Gribbin and Marcus Chown, which is the sequel to their previous collaboration *Double Planet*. But not for long, because *Reunion* is a thinly imagined farrago of clichés. Tugela, not the most prepossessing name for a heroine, stumbles through revolution in a post-technological society on a Moon terraformed a thousand years ago and now in need of fresh cometary infall to renew its atmosphere. She's been separated from her parents by a random act of war, finds them and loses them again, wanders off into the Badlands and finds a clutch of spaceships, and gets herself shut up in one which promptly takes her to Earth.

There, she's rescued from well-meaning incarceration by a young computer nerd, stumbles with him back into the spaceship again, which zips them off to a kind of comet-controlling mothership where we are not surprised to discover that the nerd is able to gain control after passing a capital-T Test which is remarkably similar to the computer games he's used to playing. If you want to harken back to the long lost pre-Golden Age of pulp fiction then maybe this is for you. But if you expected a geared-up contemporary hard sf novel from Gribbin (who is an excellent science writer) and Chown (who works for the *New Scientist* magazine) then forget it. All you're going to get is a character called Mandelbrot, a few bits of computer jargon and a good couple of pages towards the end which deftly describe the background history. Disappointing.

If it's ideas you're after, maybe Ian Watson's your man. His latest short story collection, *Stalin's Teardrops* (Gollancz, £13.99) demonstrates his fluent facility for generating narratives from the collision between place, person and pure idea with zippy playfulness. Bells don't ring for Watson, they go clong-clang-dongle, and his stories don't move in straight predictable lines.

A few of the stories here are slight, and the longest, "The Pharaoh and the Mademoiselle," gets lost in longeurs as it switches between straightforward narration of the theological upheavals of a group of Ushabti, small figurines deposited in a Pharaoh's mummy come into a life of their own, and the intrigues of the expedition which cracked their tomb, for some unclear reason laid out as dialogue in scenes from a play (playfulness taken too far, I fear). But the rest work wonderfully well. Regular readers of *Interzone* will already be familiar with the audacious "The Eye of the Ayatollah," and there's an enviable range from the detournement from the national to personal level of the politics of First World repression of Third World liberty in "The Beggars in our Back Yard," through the macabre twist of "Lambert, Lambert," to the truly bizarre mixture of terrorism and time-travel of "In the Upper Cretaceous with the Summerfire Brigade." Watson isn't afraid to tackle contentious topics, and even his lightest stories have the scratchy spark of intellect in their telling. He repays your attention.

Ian Watson is the only British contributor to Anne Jordan's theme anthology *Fires of the Past* (St. Martin's Press, \$15.95). It's a model of its kind, with a strong list of contributors and a theme that is strong enough to bracket the stories within a specific target, yet loose enough to allow a wide range of perspectives. The theme is the home-town, that North American notion strongly meaningful to the population of a country forever on the move, and it has to be said that Ian Watson's story about Daventry would be weird enough in this context even if it wasn't by Ian Watson.

The other stories range from the impacted *Twilight Zone* feeling of Lewis Shiner's "Wild For You," a story of life on the interstate; through "Buffalo," John Kessel's postmodernist fictional account of the encounter his father didn't really have with H.G. Wells; to "The Great Steam Bison of Cycad Center," Edward Bryant's gonzo account of killer dinosaur robots. Other contributors include Harlan Ellison, George Alec Effinger, Karen Haber, Joe Haldeman, James Patrick Kelly, Kit Reed, Jane Yolen, Robert Silverberg, and Connie Willis. It's an enviable list of contributors to a collection as strong as any of the anniversary

issues of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, of which Anne Jordan was once managing editor. Short stories are more than the small change of sf narration; the best are exercises which keep it limber, the seedcorn from which so many careers have sprung, hormonal spurts in the growth of the genre. Anne Jordan has done a fine job in cultivating her particular patch of fertile ground.

(Paul J. McAuley)

You got an ology?

Wendy Bradley

Why are there so many trilogies? No, don't be cynical, ignore for a moment the convenience-for-publishers factor. It's as old as Aristotle: "a whole is that which has a beginning, a middle and an end." The natural form for fictional discourse must surely be threefold: meet the characters, learn the problem, find the solution.

Unfortunately the publishing trade at the moment seems to have cottoned on to the fact that this Rule of Three does not necessarily apply to the buyer's wallet which can be stretched by adding in extra complications to the middle volume. So we move on from the trilogy to the serial, the oct- and dec- and whatever multiple you like-ologies that are a bastard form of trilogy masquerading as the genuine open-ended series.

The Dragon Reborn (Volume 3 of *The Wheel of Time*) by Robert Jordan (Tor, \$22.95) is a book which I had looked forward to a great deal, believing it would be the last in a trilogy. No, alas, it ends as unsatisfactorily as the previous two and it seems there is no trill in this ology.

Jordan's cast list continues to grow and he continues to be particularly strong in creating differentiated women characters and describing their uneasy relationships with their men-folk. However after fifteen hundred pages of three substantial volumes I expected a resolution, rather than a pantomime ending in which Rand, Mat, Moraine, the other women, and the Aiel (in the real world) and Perrin, his dead wolf-friend and his new girlfriend (in the equivalent area of the dream world) all arrive coincidentally, separately and simultaneously at the site of the final battle. Jordan almost pulls it off by using Rand's ability to act as a sort of distorting influence on history to create coincidences elsewhere in the plot, but I still couldn't keep a straight face at the number of "gosh, didn't that look just like Rand, but of course he couldn't be here now..." scenes. Jordan has lost control

of his plot, so its weave is beginning to show holes; principally the gaping hole at the centre that he creates by letting Rand wander off with no-one to share his thoughts about the plot. I diagnose *Dune-itis*, alas.

Louise Cooper's *Indigo* saga was advertised from the start as a series of eight novels and, after the initial scene-setter, one assumed that Indigo herself would spend a novel putting down each of the seven demons she has to pursue, effectively giving us a trilogy with costume changes. However the fifth volume, **Troika** (Grafton, £3.99), is a weird one: the macguffin for Indigo's pursuit of the demons was that her lover Fenran was being held in some purgatorial other dimension and would be released when she won through. This plot token is somewhat devalued in *Troika* when Indigo meets Fenran's descendant and double, Veness, and forms a liaison with him. Indeed "lover" seems to be an inaccurate description of Fenran since we are told that Indigo loses her virginity to Veness. Fenran doesn't even get to make his usual walk-on appearance at the end of the novel to spur her on to the next episode. As the octet? octology?? enters its second half it becomes increasingly difficult to see how it can be resolved. When they get to the "living happily ever after" bit how and where are they going to do it? Isn't Fenran likely to have been, well, changed at least, by being tortured for (at the present rate of progress) seventy years? Why are the seven demons being so darned gentlemanly about appearing only one at a time in carefully scattered locations? And is that bloody wolf ever going to learn to speak without h-y-ph-ension?

Robert Asprin's "Myth" series is a series: we know who the people are and what their relationship is and what kind of things can and cannot happen but there is always room for a new character or someone can be written out; if we learned the rules we could churn them out ourselves. **Little Myth Marker** (Legend, £3.50) is quite funny, but not funny enough to get over the awful pun of the title. A nice-guy magician and his weirdly talented pals cope with predatory molls and little girls of awesome cuteness and he gets to work out the plot all on his own (even if he is a couple of chapters behind the reader). And he's a nice guy. A train book – it'll last you from London to Leicester but you won't mind leaving it behind for the next passenger.

There is room on all our shelves for the undemanding series where you just plod on and plot off: the series in the *Dynasty* mode, one dam' thing after another. **The Black Shields** (Book Two

of *Stormlands*) by John Maddox Roberts (Tor, \$3.99) is just such a book. Maddox Roberts has written Conan books (but don't hold that against him) and like them this, too, is a train book. Warrior King One has united some plainsman tribes and Warrior King Two, his ancient enemy, has just invaded to the north. King Two is evil and so has an Evil Wife and King One has a misguided ex-girlfriend (who gets captured and so on by Evil Wife and thus becomes a Reformed Character) and she has more brains than her Weakly Father and these five comprise virtually the entire speaking cast. On the railway scale, this is maybe Sheffield to Manchester.

There are, however, different kinds of series, which move through a three-dimensional world and so do not have to follow a linear pattern, even if this can make their overall shape harder to grasp than the simple graph of a trilogy. **A Time of Exile** (Grafton, £14.99) is described as "Book One of the Westlands Cycle" and on its back cover I see that Katherine Kerr has also written a series of four "Deverry novels" so, as some of the action in this one takes place in Deverry, I assume I am reading the beginning of a new phase in an open-ended series. This one begins well enough with a half-elven ruler faking his own death to disguise his illegitimate longevity and meeting up with characters with whom he had various adventures in his youth. However instead of the expected flash-back to describe those adventures we flash-back to different characters and the entire cast changes several times in the course of the book. I confess I have taken two months to read this one since it appeared to me to have no grip at all: I kept picking it up and thinking (say) "isn't it a long time since I last read *Middlemarch*?" and then putting it down again until I had done just that. However the individual scenes themselves I found absorbing – I just couldn't connect them together. I suggest for the paperback they put the chart showing you how the various characters are reincarnations of each other at the front, not the back!

Of course the real justification for the series form is that three books are hardly enough to describe a whole world if an author is skilled enough in world-weaving. Steven Brust has created a wonderful world in the *Dragaeran Empire* with its long lived inhabitants, seventeen noble houses and its great cycle of different rulers and in **Taltos and the Paths of the Dead** (Pan, £4.99) he has a smart feisty hero and a lively modern style in sharp contrast to the cod Dumas of his recent, *The Phoenix Guards*. Vlad Taltos is a sparky character, the style is marvelous and the construction – inter-

weaving magic, a sufficiency of flashback to give you the background and the nonsensical plot about going into the (elves only) underworld to rescue a character trapped in a magic staff – is splendid. Ignore the bloody awful cover and buy it.

Finally, with **The Heirs of Hammer-fell** (Legend, £3.99) Marion Zimmer Bradley illustrates my point about a good world needing a whole series and makes a welcome return to Darkover. Unfortunately she does so with a story of positively Shakespearian ludicrousness: separated-at-birth twins, born into a society of telepaths, begin to get lurid mental images of other lives and don't immediately deduce that the other has survived! Oh come on, Will himself couldn't make you believe all that mismatched twins falling for the wrong woman nonsense so what makes MZB think she can bring it off? More Free Women and less silly plotting, please.

(Wendy Bradley)

Wandering (Pub) Bore?

Jones & McIntosh

There is nothing misleading about the title of **Tales of the Wandering Jew** edited by Brian Stableford (Dedalus, £8.99), because that's exactly what the collection delivers – twenty of them to be precise, plus three short poems, and an introduction from the editor. The Wandering Jew (variously named in different versions of the legend, but most commonly known as either Ahasuerus or Cartaphilus), encountered Christ on his way to the crucifixion, offended him in one way or another, and was cursed to walk the earth until the time of the second coming. As Stableford's extensive introduction makes clear, it's a legend which has inspired many writers over several hundred years and about half of the stories he's gathered in this anthology are what he describes as "antique tales" (i.e. they're pretty old) by the likes of Rudyard Kipling, O. Henry, A.T. Quiller-Couch and John Galsworthy. These long-mothballed stories seem to be of mainly academic interest, except perhaps for the Kipling, which, although entitled "The Wandering Jew," actually steers well clear of the legend to deliver a brief but effective comment on the search for immortality.

The remaining stories are original works by largely familiar names from the modern sf & fantasy field. The Kim Newman/Eugene Byrne partnership is represented here, but if you were expecting something as lively as their

recent "USSA" series in *Interzone* you'd be disappointed; "The Wandering Christian" is a history lecture that segues into a parallel-history lecture about halfway through. It's also a story that exemplifies the problem several of these contributions – and this volume as a whole – have: our Wanderer is all too willing to launch into the tale of his l-o-n-g life, but, once started, he comes across as the archetypal pub bore, able to transmute the potentially fascinating into the excruciatingly dull. Mike Resnick's "How I Wrote the New Testament, Ushered in the Renaissance, and Birdied the 17th Hole at Pebble Beach" and David Langford's hard-sf "Waiting for the Iron Age" are further examples, both mercifully shorter.

Elsewhere other "moderns" try various slants to freshen the antique tale. Scott Edelman's "The Wandering Jukebox" is waiting not for the second coming but the Repairman, but the story quickly flags, while Pat Gray's "The German Motorcyclist" is just mystifyingly obscure. Steve Rasnic Tem's "Wanderlust" deals with the problems of an immortal having children, while "Little St. Hugh" by Geoffrey Farrington gives us a deft picture of sacrifice and satanism in the middle ages. Both Ian McDonald's "Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" and Robert Irwin's "Waiting for the Zaddik" touch on the nightmare of the holocaust; both are well-written, worthy, but not all that successful. Then Barrington Bayley transplants the myth to a far-future alien world, with the human race extinct except for Cartaphilus – it's all right while it lasts, but doesn't have enough punch at the end.

Perhaps the best of the original stories is Brian Stableford's own, "Innocent Blood," which sites the wanderer in the present day UK as the mute and infuriating captor of an AIDS-infected heroin addict. The story chronicles the junkie's descent through a cold-turkey hell towards acceptance of whatever fate awaits him. At times the the angry-punk style seems strained, but the characterization remains interesting.

Theme anthologies run the risk of familiarity breeding if not contempt then at least boredom in the reader, and the stories here are collectively hamstrung by the Wandering Jew legend – the total effect is almost as if the needle has stuck on the Wandering Jukebox. Added to that, the mix of original and "antique" stories lacks any compelling rationale, either literary or commercial – fans of Bayley and Stableford and Resnick may well overlap, but they could find, say, John Galsworthy very hard going.

(Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh)

Compelling Structures

Matthew Dickens

The Architecture of Desire (Bantam, £13.99) by Mary Gentle is another offbeat fantasy from the author of *Rats and Gargoyles*, except that in the new book the Gargoyles have all gone and the Rats are just rats again. The setting is London at the time of an alternate civil war between Queen Carola II ("the Queen-bitch") and Protector-general Olivia ("the bitch-general"). Valentine White Crow and Baltazar Casaubon from *Rats* have got married and settled down. Their domesticity is disturbed, however, when a party of gentleman-mercenaries headed by Casaubon's old friend Pollexfen Calmady, turns up demanding shelter from the elements, closely followed by the enigmatic Desire-of-the-Lord-Guillaume, who is almost immediately raped by Calmady while she is under sedation.

The family then go to London, where Casaubon is to apply his skills as Lord-Architect to finding out why the Protector-general's new temple, the eye of the sun, keeps falling down as fast as the builders can pile up the bricks. Meanwhile, White Crow is given the task of trying to buy Carola off with Protectorate gold, so the latter will go into voluntary exile and avert a potential bloodbath.

It is in fact blood, or to be precise, blood-royal which is jinxing the eye of the sun; the virus-ridden blood of centuries of monarchs, used to consecrate earth for building, is summoning up demonic manifestations which preclude any new construction projects. Yet curiously, what seems to be shaping up to form the main body of the plot gets sidelined, as the rapes (there are two more later on) emerge as the key concern in the novel. This is what makes *Architecture* different again from its predecessor, and from the bulk of genre fantasy you're likely to encounter. If anything, this is one of the rare novels which could do with being longer... After the meticulous orchestration of *Rats*, the narrative here has a vaguely truncated feel. But if you can share the author's contagious fascination with Renaissance *magia*, astrology and alchemy, can appreciate her gift for vividly creating a scene and characters with a few deft keystrokes, revel in bravura rewritings of history, enjoy stories featuring 17th-century savants (who really lived), Elias Ashmole, William Lilly, John Aubrey, William Harvey (in fact everyone except Richard Napier and Simon Forman – what happened to them?), can identify with seriously liberated sword-wielding mothers, will

suspend your disbelief sufficiently to credit weather-vanes that talk and heads on the spikes of Traitors Gate which have been forced to recite their crimes – then this is the book for you.

(Matthew Dickens)

UK Books Received

July 1991

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in *quotes* following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

[Andrews, Virginia.] **Secrets of the Morning**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-71741-3, 405pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Romantic novel with horror overtones, first published in the USA, 1991; proof copy received; sequel to *Dawn* in the "Cutler family series"; it's described on the cover as "The New Virginia Andrews™" and it states inside that "Virginia Andrews is a trademark of the Virginia C. Andrews Trust"; in other words, this is not a book by the said Virginia Andrews [who died in 1986] but one ghost-written to her patented formula; according to hearsay, the real author is probably horror writer Andrew Neiderman.) 16th September.

Asimov, Isaac, and Robert Silverberg. **Child of Time**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04699-6, 302pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; it's based in part on Asimov's story "The Ugly Little Boy" [1958]; see the Silverberg interview in *Interzone* 52.) 8th August.

Attanasio, A.A. **Hunting the Ghost Dancer**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13575-1, 371pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Prehistoric adventure story, first published in the USA [?], 1991; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 8th August.

Brin, David. **Earth**. Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4872-9, 751pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 39.) 25th July.

Brooke, Keith. **Expatria**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04921-9, 252pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the second novel by a young British writer who has contributed several short stories to *Interzone*.) 25th July.

Butler, Octavia. **Clay's Ark**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04820-4, 201pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1984.) 25th July.

Charrette, Robert N. **Shadowrun: Choose Your Enemies Carefully. Secrets of Power, Volume 2**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015240-7, 374pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; it's based on a role-playing game, although not one which is part of the TSR stable.) 5th August.

Clegg, Douglas. **Breeder**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55115-6, 310pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 4th July.

Clute, John, Lee Montgomerie and David Pringle, eds. **Interzone: The 5th Anthology**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-54063-4, 280pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; contains 13 stories reprinted from this magazine, plus two originals – "Looking

Forward to the Harvest" by Cherry Wilder and "Light" by Barrington J. Bayley; we recommend it, naturally.) 1st August.

Constantine, Storm. **Hermitech**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3609-7, 502pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in *Interzone* 45.) 11th July.

De Haven, Tom. **Walker of Worlds: Chronicles of the King's Tramp, Book 1**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-014951-1, 343pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; this one is a "Byron Preiss Book," as well as a Doubleday book, a Dell book, a Penguin book and, now, a Roc book...) 5th August.

Dicks, Terrance. **Doctor Who: Planet of the Spiders**. "Number 48 in the Target Doctor Who Library." Virgin/Target, ISBN 0-426-10655-5, 121pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile sf novelization, first published in 1980; based on the BBC television serial by Robert Sloman.) 15th August.

Dicks, Terrance. **Doctor Who: The Three Doctors**. "Number 64 in the Target Doctor Who Library." Virgin/Target, ISBN 0-426-11578-3, 127pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile sf novelization, first published in 1975; based on the BBC television serial by Robert Baker and Dave Martin.) 15th August.

Dicks, Terrance. **Timewyrm: Exodus**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20357-7, 234pp, paperback, £3.50. (Shared-universe juvenile sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Timewyrm: Genesis*; it features Hitler and Co. as villains.) 15th August.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **Best New SF 5**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-091-2, 624pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA as *The Year's Best Science Fiction, Eighth Annual Collection*, 1991; contains two selections from *Interzone*, Greg Egan's "Learning to Be Me" and Ian R. MacLeod's "Past Magic," plus two stories each from *Omni* and *Playboy*, one each from *Alien Sex*, *Amazing*, *Analog*, *New Pathways*, *Other Edens III*, *Universe 1*, *Semiotext(e)*, *F & SF* and *Zenith 2*, and ten from Asimov's.) 26th August.

Fichman, Frederick. **Seti** [i.e. SETI, an acronym for "Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence"]. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3679-8, 336pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; the publishers seem to have made an error on the title page by not capitalizing the acronym; at first we assumed this was a non-fiction book about its stated subject, but it turns out to be a novel.) 15th August.

Ford, Adam. **The Cuckoo Plant**. Mandarin/Teens, ISBN 0-7497-0613-9, 238pp, paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition.) 15th July.

Frossard, Philippe. **The Lottery of Life: The New Genetics and the Future of Mankind**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02466-4, 252pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Popular science text, first edition.) 8th August.

Gabaldon, Diana. **Cross Stitch**. Century, ISBN 0-7126-4760-0, 642pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991; the opening volume in a trilogy by a new American author, it appears to be a "timeslip romance.") 8th August.

Gay, Anne. **The Brooch of Azure Midnight**. Macdonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-356-19696-8, 455pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first edition; this is Gay's second novel, following *Mindsail*.) 12th September.

Gerson, Jack. **The Evil Thereof**. Piatkus, ISBN 0-7499-0080-6, 348pp, hardcover,

£13.95. (Horror/crime novel, first edition.) 1st August.

Gibson, William, and Bruce Sterling. **The Difference Engine**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05073-X, 383pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 43.) 25th July.

Gilluly, Sheila. **Ritnym's Daughter**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3640-2, 437pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; third in the "Greenbriar Queen" trilogy.) 15th August.

Grant, John. **Albion**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0351-2, 311pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; "John Grant" is a pseudonym for Paul Barnett.) 7th November.

Hambly, Barbara. **Dark Hand of Magic**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21470-4, 309pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 8th August.

Hambly, Barbara. **The Rainbow Abyss**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13837-8, 256pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 8th August.

Hart, Chris, ed. **The Pseudo-Nymph: An Anthology of NSFA Member Magazines**. Hart [16 Walker Ave., Great Lever, Bolton, Lancs. BL3 2DU], ISBN 0-9517848-0-3, paperbound, £2.25. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; this is a small-press item, A4 size; it contains selections from such New SF Alliance publications as *Auguries*, *BBR* and *Dream*.) 1st August.

Herron, Don. **Reign of Fear: Fiction and Film of Stephen King (1982-1989)**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31347-9, 254pp, paperback, £4.99. (Anthology of critical essays, first published in the USA, 1988; contains pieces by L. Sprague de Camp, Thomas M. Disch, Thomas Tessier, the late Charles Willeford and other quite surprising contributors.) 9th August.

James, Peter. **Sweet Heart**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0895-5, 335pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1990; James has a growing reputation as a newish British writer of what the publishers call "upmarket horror," by which we assume they mean he's more like Peter Straub than Shaun Hutson.) 8th August.

Jones, Stephen, and Ramsey Campbell, eds. **Best New Horror 2**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-094-7, 433pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; contains a large selection of 1990's best stories, including two from this magazine, Nicholas Royle's "Negatives" and Kim Newman's "The Original Dr Shade," plus pieces by Jonathan Carroll, Harlan Ellison, Elizabeth Hand, K.W. Jeter, Garry Kilworth, Thomas Ligotti, Ian R. MacLeod, Peter Straub, Cherry Wilder, F. Paul Wilson, Gene Wolfe, etc; recommended.) 26th August.

Kilworth, Garry. **The Drowners**. Methuen, ISBN 0-416-17682-8, 153pp, hardcover, £8.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition.) 8th August.

Kinsman, Francis. **Millennium: Towards Tomorrow's Society**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014721-7, 294pp, paperback, £6.99. (Futurological speculation, first published in 1990.) 29th August.

Koontz, Dean R. **The Servants of Twilight**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0389-X, 313pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1984; it originally appeared under the pseudonym "Leigh Nichols," and a mass-market paperback edition was issued by Headline some months ago.) 8th August.

Koontz, Dean R. **Shadowfires**. Headline,

ISBN 0-7472-3681-X, 598pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1987; it originally appeared under the pseudonym "Leigh Nichols.") 15th August.

Kruger, Peter. **Fahrenbrink**. Digithurst [Newark Close, Royston, Herts. SG8 5HL], ISBN 0-9516631-1-9, 146pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Sf novel [?], first edition; it appears to be self-published, and concerned with "Multimedia and Virtual Reality.") July?

Laymon, Richard. **Darkness, Tell Us**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0417-9, 312pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991; proof copy received.) 7th November.

Lumley, Brian. **Necroscope V: Deadspawn**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20905-0, 586pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 25th July.

MacAvoy, R.A. **Lens of the World**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0413-6, 286pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; proof copy received; it's described as the first in a series.) 12th September.

Marlow, Max. **Meltdown**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-53785-4, 286pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Near-future "environmental" thriller, first edition; "Max Marlow" is a pseudonym for Christopher and Diane Nicole.) 18th July.

Miller, Frank, and Dave Gibbons. **Give Me Liberty**. "An American Dream." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013112-4, unpaginated (circa 200pp?), trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf graphic novel, first published in the USA, 1990; it appears to be a complex tale set in a dystopian near future.) 29th August.

Murphy, Pat. **The City, Not Long After**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31277-4, 320pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 9th August.

Niles, Douglas. **Feathered Dragon**. "Forgotten Realms Fantasy Adventure. Book Three: The Maztica Trilogy." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014524-9, 316pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 25th July.

Pratchett, Terry. **Faust Eric**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05191-4, 155pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous fantasy novella, first published in 1990.) 8th August.

Reed, Robert. **Black Milk**. Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8356-7, 327pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 25th July.

Salvatore, R.A. **Echoes of the Fourth Magic**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015238-5, 319pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; this tale of the magic behind the so-called Devil's Triangle is one of the launch titles for Penguin's new "Roc" line.) 5th August.

Saul, John. **Second Child**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40322-2, 355pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 8th August.

Shaw, Bob. **Orbitsville**. Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4917-2, 219pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1975; there have been previous mass-market paperback editions from both Pan Books and Granada/Grafton; it's one of Shaw's best and deserves to keep coming back into print.) 25th July.

Shupp, Mike. **Death's Grey Land: Book Four of The Destiny Makers**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3584-8, 322pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 11th July.

Stanton, Mary. **Piper at the Gates of Dawn**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53223-2, 307pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first pub-

lished in the USA, 1989; sequel to *The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West*.) 1st August.

Stasheff, Christopher. **The Warlock's Night Out**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31306-1, 576pp, paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition; the three novels it contains were first published in the USA as *The Warlock Wandering*, 1986, *The Warlock is Missing*, 1986, and *The Warlock Heretical*, 1987.) 9th August.

Stewart, Alex, and Neil Gaiman, eds. **Temps, Volume 1**. "At last, the cutting edge of superhero fantasy!" Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-014560-5, 355pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; containing all-new stories by David V. Barrett, Storm Constantine, Colin Greenland, Roz Kaveney, David Langford, Brian Stableford, "Jack Yeovil" and others, this looks very much like a British attempt to rival George R.R. Martin's *Wild Cards* series of anthologies; how can we resist when Yeovil's "Pitbull Brittan" begins with a cod reference to the story having first appeared in "Union Jack's Magazine, a pulp-fiction periodical edited by David Pringle"?) 5th August.

Taylor, Roger. **Dream Finder**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0395-4, 436pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 8th August.

Vance, Jack. **Lyonesse: Suldrun's Garden**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-06027-8, 436pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1983; seventh Grafton printing.) 8th August.

Vance, Jack. **Lyonesse II: The Green Pearl**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-06751-5, 407pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1985; fourth Grafton printing.) 8th August.

Vance, Jack. **Lyonesse III: Madouc**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20450-4, 544pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; winner of the World Fantasy Award.) 8th August.

Wells, Angus. **Forbidden Magic: Book One of The Godwars**. Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0490-9, 586pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 25th July.

Westwood, Chris. **Dark Brigade**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3479-5, 341pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first edition [?].) 15th August.

White, Gill. **The Plague Stone**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-984640-3, 222pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in 1990; the author's name is given as "Gillian White" on the cover.) August?

White, Robin A. **The Flight from Winter's Shadow**. Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-19757-3, 312pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Near-future hi-tech thriller, first published in the USA, 1990; a debut novel.) 11th July.

Overseas Books Received

Anderson, Dana M., and others. **Cafe Purgatorium**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85180-4, 279pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Horror anthology, first edition; contains three novellas, by Anderson, Charles de Lint and Ray Garton.) 22nd July.

Anderson, Poul. **The Shield of Time**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51000-3, 436pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; a late sequel to Anderson's "Time Patrol" tales of the 1950s and 60s.) July.

Anderson, Poul. **The Time Patrol**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85231-2, 458pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf collection, first edition; proof

copy received; it contains all the "Time Patrol" stories, originally collected in *Guardians of Time* [1961] and *Time Patrolman* [1983], together with a new novella, "Star of the Sea," and a couple of other fugitive pieces.) November.

Anthony, Piers. **Hasan**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51348-7, 242pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1977; in a 1986 "Author's Note" Anthony tells how he wrote this Arabian Nights adventure early in his career, 1966-67, and then couldn't find a willing publisher for years.) July.

Barnes, John. **Orbital Resonance**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85206-1, 214pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) December.

Cooper, Louise. **Troika: Book Five of Indigo**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-50799-1, 312pp, paperback, \$4.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; actually, it appears to be more or less simultaneous with the British edition, from Grafton Books.) July.

Ing, Dean. **Silent Thunder**. (With Robert A. Heinlein's *Universe*.) "Tor SF Double No. 31." Tor, ISBN 0-812-50265-5, 220pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novella, first edition; the Ing story, which has not been published previously, fills 160 pages; the Heinlein novelette, which dates from 1941, is well known to most sf readers as a segment of his book *Orphans of the Sky*.) July.

Jordan, Robert. **Conan the Unconquered**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51400-9, 286pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1983; a sequel by another hand to Robert E. Howard's "Conan" tales; Robert Jordan is now a major fantasy writer under his own steam.) July.

MacAvoy, R.A. **King of the Dead**. Morrow, ISBN 0-688-09600-X, 252pp, hardcover, \$19. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *Lens of the World*.) 19th November.

Maddox, Tom. **Halo**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85249-5, 216pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut novel by a writer already known for his sf short stories and criticism.) November.

Nighbert, David F. **Clouds of Magellan**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-05834-9, 308pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Timelapse*.) Late entry: 20th June publication, received in July.

Norton, Andre, and Mercedes Lackey. **The Elvenbane: An Epic High Fantasy of the Halfblood Chronicles**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85106-5, 390pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) November.

Pike, Christopher. **Sati**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51035-6, 276pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy [?] novel, first published in the USA, 1990; Pike is best known as a writer of "young adult" horror/suspense books, but this appears to be his first novel for mature readers.) July.

Reaves, Michael. **Street Magic**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85125-1, 246pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 7th July.

Saberhagen, Fred. **Berserker's Planet**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-50981-1, 233pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1975.) July.

Somtow, S.P. **Vampire Junction**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-52596-5, 362pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1984; "S.P. Somtow" is a form of his name used by Thai-born author Somtow Sucharitkul.) July.

Sutphen, Richard. **Sexpunks & Savage**

Sagas: Dark, Quirky, Erotic Stories. Spine-Tingling Press [Box 186, Agoura Hills, CA 91376, USA], ISBN 0-87554-476-2, 255pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Horror collection, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous signed limited edition [not seen]; our review copy came with two audio tapes containing story-readings.) 1st October.

Swanwick, Michael. **Gravity's Angels: 13 Stories.** Illustrations by Janet Aulisio. Arkham House, ISBN 0-87054-162-5, 302pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (SF/fantasy collection, first edition; Swanwick's debut collection, though he has previously published three novels and a novella; one of these stories, "Foresight" [1987], first appeared in *Interzone*; this is another beautifully produced Arkham House first edition, with cover paintings by Pablo Picasso, no less.) 5th August.

Windling, Terri, ed. **Life on the Border.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-50824-6, 372pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Shared-world fantasy anthology, first edition; get this: "Bordertown, as portrayed in the anthologies *Borderland*, *Bordertown* and *Life on the Border*, as well as in the novel *Elsewhere* by Will Shetterly, was created by Terri Windling with creative inspiration from Mark Alan Arnold, and fleshed out by Bellamy Bach, Stephen R. Boyett, Emma Bull, Kara Dalkey, Charles de Lint, Craig Shaw Gardner, Robert Gould, Zora Greenhaugh, Phil Hale, Michael Korolenko, Ellen Kushner, Will Shetterly, and Midori Snyder.") July.

Zelazny, Roger. **Prince of Chaos.** Morrow, ISBN 0-688-08727-2, 225pp, hardcover, \$19. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's the tenth in his apparently endless "Amber" series.) 19th November.

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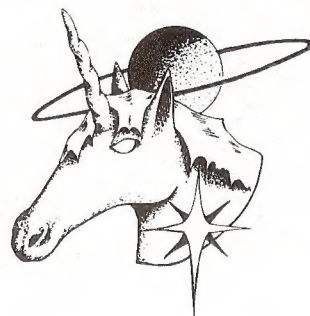
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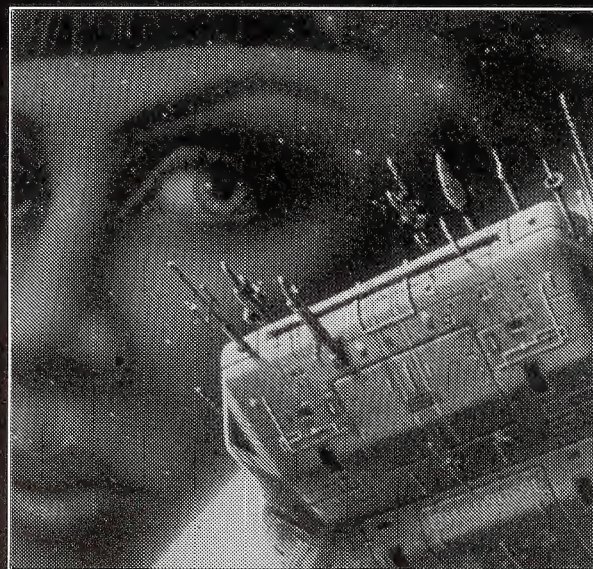
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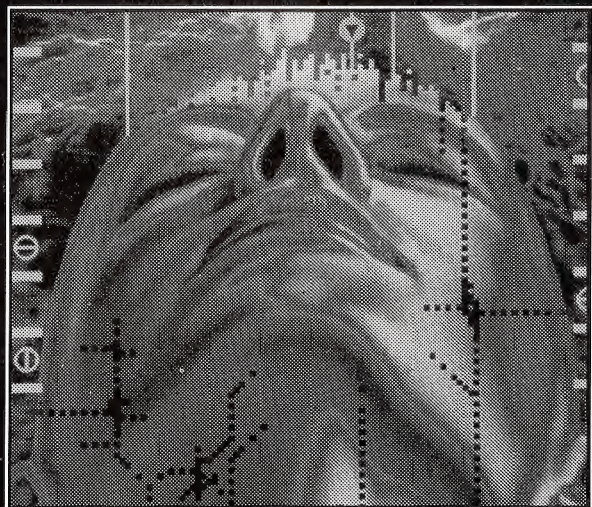
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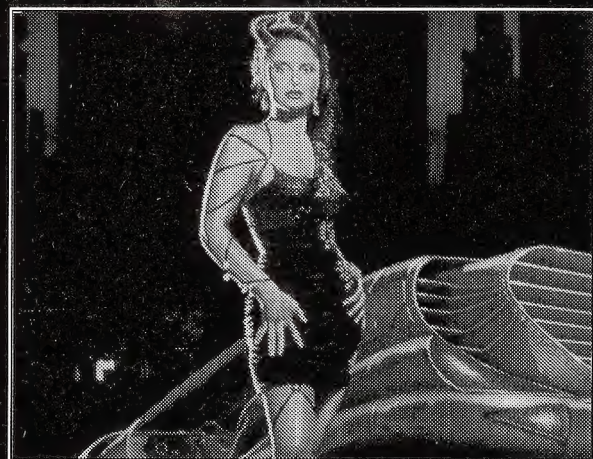
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